Too Much World

The Films of Hito Steyerl

Edited by Nick Aikens

SternbergPress

The Van Abbemuseum and the Institute of Modern Art are delighted to publish *Too Much World* on the occasion of the first major survey of Hito Steyerl's work. We are grateful for the commitment and vision of the artist whose writings and artworks drive discourse on the most contemporary of subjects—the image.

The Kuratorium, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
Aileen Burns and Johan Lundh,
Co-directors, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane

This publication is made possible
with the kind support of

Andrew Kreps Gallery
Wilfried Lentz Rotterdam

Hito Steyerl
Too Much World

Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane

SternbergPress

Contents

pp. 7—12
Introduction
Nick Aikens and Annie Fletcher



pp. 13—28
How Not to Be Seen.
A Fucking Didactic
Educational .Mov File

pp. 29—40
Too Much World:
Is the Internet Dead?
Hito Steyerl



pp. 41—44
Strike

pp. 45—62
Hito Steyerl:
Postcinematic Essays
after the Future
Sven Lütticken



pp. 65—80
November

pp. 81—92
In Praise of Populist
Cinema. On Hito
Steyerl's *November*
and *Lovely Andrea*
Pablo Lafuente



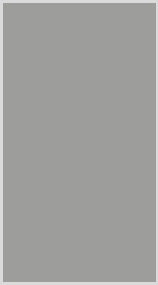
pp. 93—108
Lovely Andrea

pp. 109—114
Lovely Andrea
Thomas Elsaesser



pp. 117—132
In Free Fall

pp. 133—148
"Is this for real?" A Close Reading of *In Free Fall* by Hito Steyerl
David Riff

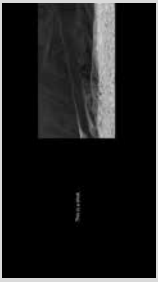


pp. 149—160
Adorno's Grey

pp. 161—166
Theory and the Young Girl
Ana Teixeira Pinto



pp. 169—178
Guards



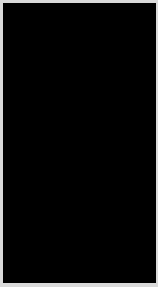
pp. 179—184
Abstract

pp. 185—194
Bullets from the Black Box: Hito Steyerl's *Is the Museum a Battlefield?* and *Guards*
Nick Aikens



pp. 197—220
Liquidity Inc.

pp. 221—228
Hyper-Elasticity Symptoms, Signs, Treatment: On Hito Steyerl's *Liquidity Inc.*
Karen Archey



pp. 229—231
Red Alert

pp. 232—244
Credits, biography and bibliography

Introduction

Hito Steyerl is rightly considered one of the most exciting artistic voices working today, who speculates on the impact of the Internet and digitisation on the fabric of our everyday lives. Her films and writing offer an astute, provocative and often funny analysis of the dizzying speed with which images and data are reconfigured, altered and dispersed, and then over again, accelerating into infinity or crashing and falling apart.

This book has been conceived to sit alongside Steyerl's survey exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum and the IMA and covers works from the past decade alongside new films produced for this occasion. Together, the publication's contents offer an opportunity to reflect on Steyerl's work as a filmmaker, writer and thinker. More importantly perhaps, it allows us to consider the ideas that she has put into play and that continue to resonate. The exhibition and its future manifestations in different contexts and institutional settings – accompanied by this book – can be used as an extended (and hopefully extending) series of digital, textual and architectural speculations on themes that have emerged in Steyerl's films and writing over the past ten years.

Most recently, Steyerl has coalesced many of these ideas in the term "circulationism", which she introduces in the first essay of this book. Steyerl focuses on circulationism as way of understanding the contemporary potential

of art and the image. She suggests that we have long since entered into a new paradigm – a space of no return – a free-flowing system of 'circulation' that circumscribes and influences everything from the government to love. Understanding that, far from being sovereign subjects, we too have become data-objects to be mined with relations between body, material world and the virtual becoming increasingly unstable and fluid. Crucially, Steyerl remarks that circulationism, if reinvented, could also be about short-circuiting existing networks, circumventing and bypassing fixed regimes of power and money.

Steyerl's essay speculates on the effects of digitisation slipping off-screen and entering the material world. What happens to our thought patterns, our language and our behaviour? In this project, where ideas emerge in films that are transferred to the architecture (and politics) of a museum space, such speculations are played out through the collaboration between Steyerl and the architects Studio Miessen. The exhibition concept, also included here, shows the designs developed for the old building of the Van Abbemuseum as a *parcours* that disrupts a well-trodden system of circulation for the visitor, thinking about the traffic of digitization and how we might become hidden within physical structures. Steyerl has long been aware of the increasingly difficult status of the documentary as genre in the digital age, not quite fitting between cinema and television

on one side, and an art space, museum or gallery on the other. A large-scale exhibition offers the chance to materialise or even collapse encounters through an architectural articulation of the work from 2D and more standard 3D arrangements like the back box into a new more complex set of arrangements and explorations.

Similarly, slipping from the screen, and the space of the museum to the covers of a book, we felt it important to try and bring together the many exciting and different interpretations and analyses that Steyerl's practice has generated. Not conceived as a catalogue, but rather a gathering of texts and close readings of films that appear in the exhibition, *Too Much World* is evidence of how Steyerl's practice as a writer, artist and teacher has proved a galvanising force for a series of engaged and important thinkers.

The book's design, conceived by Bardhi Haliti, intersperses these texts with a series of film stills, selected based on cuts in the filmic editing – revealing the extraordinary library of images Steyerl draws from and re-works. As such, the films and the ideas they generate sit alongside, and flip between, one another.

Thus the book opens with the article, "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?" in which Steyerl considers, with characteristic forthrightness and wit, how the Internet has infiltrated and taken over every aspect

of our lives. She closes by asking what it would mean if the political implications of the shared, the uploaded and the user-generated were bought off-screen? This, she argues, is the true potential of our current digital age. Sven Lütticken's contribution which follows, offers a dense reflection on Steyerl's practice – her films, writing and performances – "After the Future" – looking at it within the framework (and history) of the essay form and its inherently speculative nature. Lütticken pinpoints the structural and conceptual interconnectedness of Steyerl's different modes of output, assessing how ideas circulate, mutate and re-emerge in different forms.

The book then moves into a chronological sequence of close readings of films by different writers, curators and academics, offering various interpretations of Steyerl's approach and contexts of work. Pablo Lafuente analyses *November* (2004) and *Lovely Andrea* (2007) as important examples of Steyerl's early interrogations into the status of documentary images; how they are circulated; and what transformations they subsequently go through. Equally, Lafuente identifies the use and montage of popular images, music and motifs in Steyerl's works as offering 'a new model for politicised film making'. Thomas Elsaesser's reading of *Lovely Andrea* draws attention to Steyerl's awareness of the problems and potential of the documentary genre – a genre she has

continually sought to complicate and re-inject with political relevance.

Following this, David Riff takes the reader on an extraordinary, rollicking ride through *In Free Fall* (2010). Echoing the relentless energy, edit and references of Steyerl's trilogy, Riff's reading marks an important development in understanding how the artist deploys images and cuts to mediate the 'garbled versions of the totality that we all carry around in our heads.' Ana Teixeira Pinto's reading of *Adorno's Grey* (2012) describes with precision the discussion that lies, wonderfully unresolved, at the heart of the film – and that frame much of Steyerl's work – namely, how we understand and articulate the relationship between (grey) theory and life.

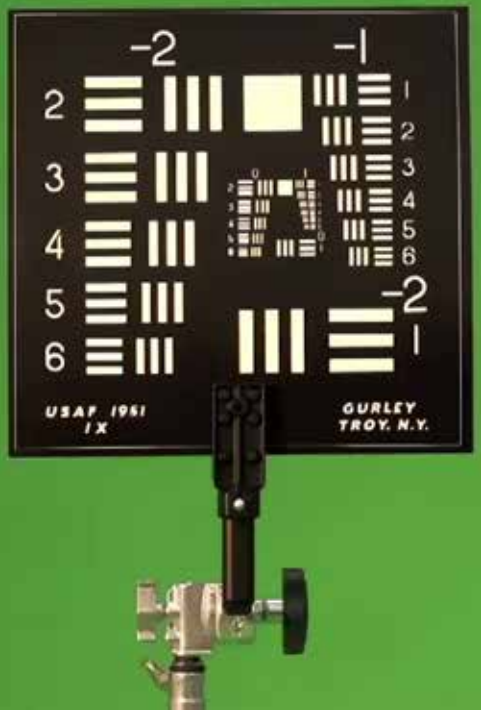
Nick Aikens then looks at *Is the Museum a Battlefield?* (2013), a recent performance-turned-film, first given at the Istanbul Biennial and re-worked for the black box. He assesses how, in recent work, Steyerl has turned her attention, to great polemic effect, from the politics of the screen to the institutions, mechanisms and money that lubricate an art world in which she is increasingly enmeshed. Lastly, Karen Archey examines Steyerl's most recent work, *Liquidity Inc.* (2014). Looking back to the birth and boom of the Internet, Archey assesses how Steyerl's work has become increasingly fragmented and unhinged, echoing our neo-liberal post–economic–crash moment, where ideas, capital and cultural

producers mutate and circulate in different forms – with the increasing fluidity of her edits and montages of her films.

Together, the texts and the accompanying stills offer a way to negotiate the many ideas and images at stake in the work of Hito Steyerl. They are ideas that flow from the page to screen, into the spaces of museums and out into the world. This publication, therefore, should not be considered as the conclusion of a discussion, or a reflection on things passed, but part of a feedback loop between various media, people and frameworks that we hope will continue long into the future.

Lastly, and most importantly, we would like to thank all the contributing writers, Bardhi Haliti and Studio Miessen for their engagement and commitment in realising this project. And to Hito herself, whose energy and ability to bend ideas, words and images to extraordinary effect has been such a pleasure to witness and engage with.

Nick Aikens and Annie Fletcher


-2
-1
2
3
4
5
6
1
2
3
4
5
6
-2
1
USAF 1951
IX
GURLEY
TROY, N.Y.

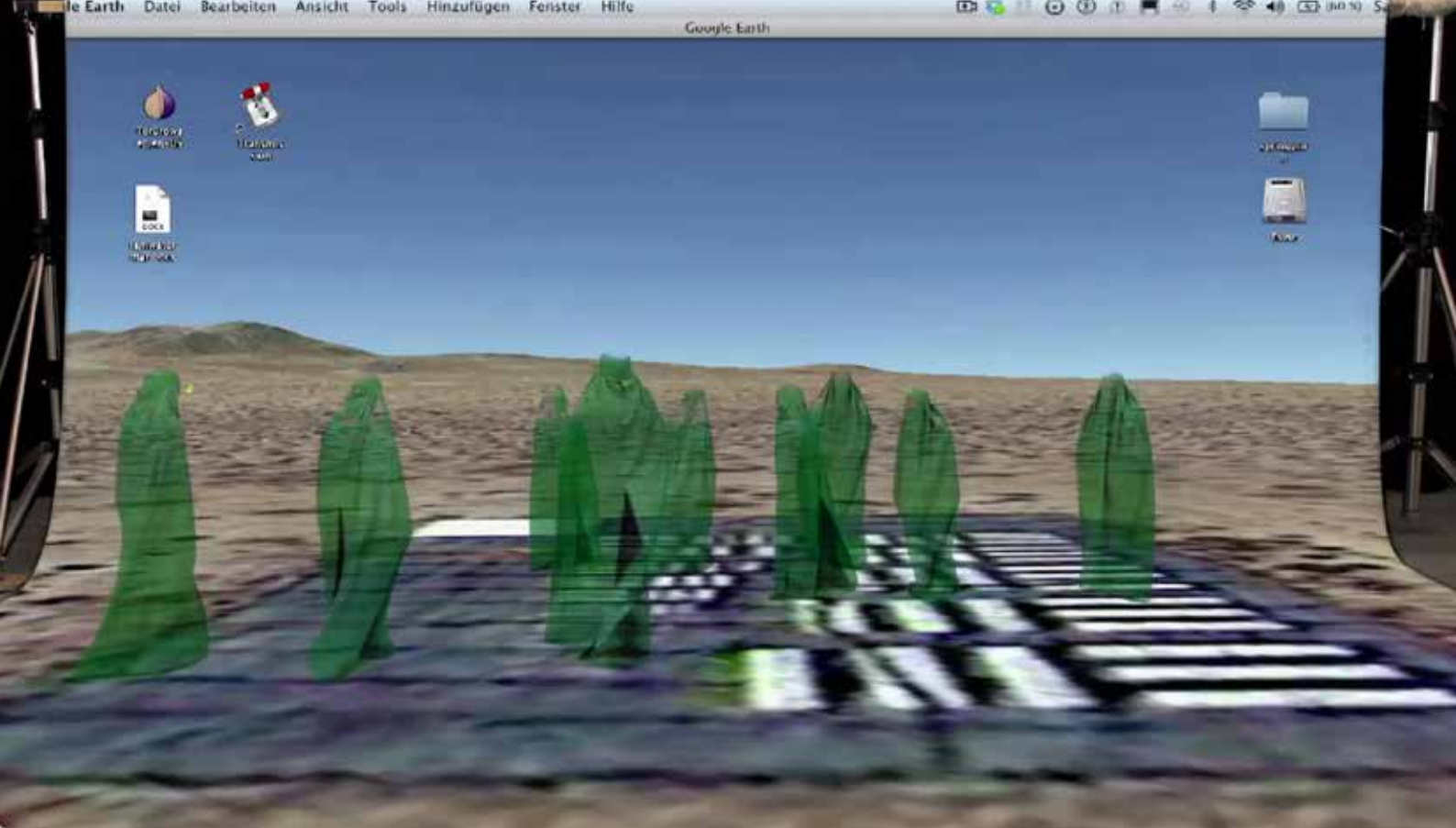

PRETEND YOU ARE NOT THERE.






pixel calibration




le Earth Datei Bearbeiten Ansicht Tools Hinzufügen Fenster Hilfe
Google Earth






and fly away with drone!

Hito Steyerl

Too Much World:
Is the Internet Dead?

Is the Internet dead?[1] This is not a metaphorical question. It does not suggest that the Internet is dysfunctional, useless or out of fashion. It asks what happened to the Internet after it stopped being a possibility. The question is very literally whether it is dead, how it died and whether anyone killed it?

But how could anyone think it could be over? The Internet is now more potent than ever. It has not only sparked but fully captured the imagination, attention and productivity of more people than at any other point before. Never before have more people been dependent on, embedded into, surveilled by and exploited by the web. It seems overwhelming, bedazzling and without immediate alternative. The Internet is probably not dead. It has rather gone all-out. Or more precisely: it is all over!

This implies a spatial dimension, but not as one might think. The Internet is not everywhere. Even nowadays when networks seem to multiply exponentially, many people have no access to the Internet or don't use it at all. And yet, it is expanding in another direction. It has started moving offline. But how does this work?

Remember the Romanian uprising in 1989, when protesters invaded TV studios to make history? At that moment, images changed their function.[2] Broadcasts from occupied TV studios became active catalysts of events – not records or documents.[3] Since then it has become clear that images are not objective or subjective renditions of a preexisting condition, or merely treacherous appearances. They are rather nodes of energy and matter that migrate across different supports,[4] shaping and affecting people, landscapes, politics and social systems. They acquired an uncanny ability to proliferate, transform and activate. Around 1989, television images started walking through screens, right into reality.[5]

This development accelerated when web infrastructure started supplementing TV networks as circuits for image circulation.[6] Suddenly, the points of

transfer multiplied. Screens were now ubiquitous, not to speak of images themselves, which could be copied and dispersed at the flick of a finger.

Data, sounds and images are now routinely transitioning beyond screens into a different state of matter.[7] They surpass the boundaries of data channels and manifest materially. They incarnate as riots or products, as lens flares, high-rises or pixelated tanks. Images become unplugged and unhinged and start crowding off-screen space. They invade cities, transforming spaces into sites, and reality into realty. They materialise as junkspace, military invasion and botched plastic surgery. They spread through and beyond networks, they contract and expand, they stall and stumble, they vie, they vile, they wow and woo.

Just look around you: artificial islands mimic genetically manipulated plants. Dental offices parade as car commercial film sets. Cheekbones are airbrushed just as whole cities pretend to be YouTube CAD tutorials. Artworks are e-mailed to pop up in bank lobbies designed on fighter jet software. Huge cloud storage drives rain down as skylines in desert locations. But by becoming real, most images are substantially altered. They get translated, twisted, bruised and reconfigured. They change their outlook, entourage and spin. A nail paint clip turns into an Instagram riot. An upload comes down as shitstorm. An animated GIF materialises as a pop-up airport transit gate. In some places, it seems as if entire NSA system architectures were built – but only after Google-translating them, creating car lofts where one-way mirror windows face inwards. By walking off-screen, images are twisted, dilapidated, incorporated and reshuffled. They miss their targets, misunderstand their purpose, get shapes and colours wrong. They walk through, fall off and fade back into screens.

Grace Jones's 2008 black-and-white video clip *Corporate Cannibal*, described by Steven Shaviro as a pivotal example of post-cinematic affect, is a case in point.[8] By now, the nonchalant fluidity and modulation

of Jones's posthuman figure has been implemented as a blueprint for austerity infrastructure. I could swear that Berlin bus schedules are consistently run on this model – endlessly stretching and straining space, time and human patience. Cinema's debris rematerialises as investment ruins or secret Information Dominance Centres.[9] But if cinema has exploded into the world to become partly real, one also has to accept that it actually did explode. And it probably didn't make it through this explosion either.

Post-Cinema

For a long time, many people have felt that cinema is rather lifeless. Cinema today is above all a stimulus package to buy new televisions, home projector systems and retina display iPads. It long ago became a platform to sell franchising products – screening feature-length versions of future PlayStation games in sanitised multiplexes. It became a training tool for what Thomas Elsaesser calls the military-industrial-entertainment complex.

Everybody has his or her own version of when and how cinema died, but I personally believe it was hit by shrapnel when, in the course of the Bosnian War, a small cinema in Jajce was destroyed around 1993. This was where the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was founded during WWII by the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ). I am sure that cinema was hit in many other places and times as well. It was shot, executed, starved and kidnapped in Lebanon and Algeria, in Chechnya and the DRC, as well as in many other post-Cold War conflicts. It didn't just withdraw and become unavailable, as Jalal Toufic wrote of artworks after what he calls a surpassing disaster.[10] It was killed, or at least it fell into a permanent coma.

But let's come back to the question we began with. In the past few years many people – basically everybody – have noticed that the Internet feels awkward, too. It is obviously completely surveilled, monopolised and

sanitised by common sense, copyright, control and conformism. It feels as vibrant as a newly multiplexed cinema in the nineties showing endless reruns of *Star Wars: Episode 1* (1999). Was the Internet shot by a sniper in Syria, a drone in Pakistan, or a tear gas grenade in Turkey? Is it in a hospital in Port Said with a bullet in its head? Did it commit suicide by jumping out the window of an Information Dominance Centre? But there are no windows in this kind of structure. And there are no walls. The Internet is not dead. It is undead and it's everywhere.

I Am a Minecraft Redstone Computer

So what does it mean if the Internet has moved offline? It crossed the screen, multiplied displays, transcended networks and cables to be at once inert and inevitable. One could imagine shutting down all online access or user activity. We might be unplugged, but this doesn't mean we're off the hook. The Internet persists offline as a mode of life, surveillance, production and organisation – a form of intense voyeurism coupled with maximum nontransparency. Imagine an Internet of things all senselessly "liking" each other, reinforcing the rule of a few quasi-monopolies. A world of privatised knowledge patrolled and defended by rating agencies. Of maximum control coupled with intense conformism, where intelligent cars do grocery shopping until a Hellfire missile comes crashing down. Police come knocking on your door for a download – to arrest you after "identifying" you on YouTube or CCTV. They threaten to jail you for spreading publicly funded knowledge? Or maybe beg you to knock down Twitter to stop an insurgency? Shake their hands and invite them in. They are today's Internet in 4D.

The all-out Internet condition is not an interface but an environment. Older media as well as imaged people, imaged structures and image objects are embedded into networked matter. Networked space is itself a medium, or whatever one might call a medium's promiscuous,

posthumous state today. It is a form of life (and death) that contains, sublates and archives all previous forms of media. In this fluid media space, images and sounds morph across different bodies and carriers, acquiring more and more glitches and bruises along the way. Moreover, it is not only form that migrates across screens, but also function.[11] Computation and connectivity permeate matter and render it as raw material for algorithmic prediction, or potentially also as building blocks for alternate networks. As Minecraft Redstone computers are able to use virtual minerals for calculating operations,[12] so is living and dead material increasingly integrated with cloud performance, slowly turning the world into a multilayered motherboard.[13]

But this space is also a sphere of liquidity, of looming rainstorms and unstable climates. It is the realm of complexity gone haywire, spinning strange feedback loops. A condition partly created by humans but also only partly controlled by them, indifferent to anything but movement, energy, rhythm and complication. It is the space of the rōnin of old, the masterless samurai freelancers fittingly called wave men and women: floaters in a fleeting world of images, interns in dark net soap lands. We thought it was a plumbing system, so how did this tsunami creep up in my sink? How is this algorithm drying up this rice paddy? And how many workers are desperately clambering on the menacing cloud that hovers in the distance right now, trying to squeeze out a living, groping through a fog which may at any second transform both into an immersive art installation and a demonstration doused in cutting-edge tear gas?

Postproduction

But if images start pouring across screens and invading subject and object matter, the major and quite overlooked consequence is that reality now widely consists of images; or rather, of things, constellations, and processes formerly evident as images. This means

one cannot understand reality without understanding cinema, photography, 3D modelling, animation or other forms of moving or still image. The world is imbued with the shrapnel of former images, as well as images edited, photoshopped, cobbled together from spam and scrap. Reality itself is postproduced and scripted, affect rendered as after-effect. Far from being opposites across an unbridgeable chasm, image and world are in many cases just versions of each other.[14] They are not equivalents however, but deficient, excessive and uneven in relation to each other. And the gap between them gives way to speculation and intense anxiety.

Under these conditions, production morphs into postproduction, meaning the world can be understood but also altered by its tools. The tools of postproduction—editing, colour correction, filtering, cutting and so on—are not aimed at achieving representation. They have become means of creation, not only of images but also of the world in their wake. One possible reason: with digital proliferation of all sorts of imagery, suddenly too much world became available. The map, to use the well-known fable by Borges, has not only become equal to the world, but exceeds it by far.[15] A vast quantity of images covers the surface of the world – a lot in the case of aerial imaging – in a confusing stack of layers. The map explodes on a material territory, which is increasingly fragmented and also gets entangled with it: in one instance, Google Maps cartography led to near military conflict.[16]

While Borges wagered that the map might wither away, Baudrillard speculated that on the contrary, reality was disintegrating.[17] In fact, *both* proliferate and confuse one another: on handheld devices, at checkpoints, and in between edits. Map and territory reach into one another to realise strokes on trackpads as theme parks or apartheid architecture. Image layers get stuck as geological strata while SWAT teams patrol Amazon shopping carts. The point is that no one can deal with this. This extensive and exhausting mess needs to be

edited down in real time: filtered, scanned, sorted and selected – into so many Wikipedia versions, into layered, libidinal, logistical, lopsided geographies.

This assigns a new role to image production, and in consequence also to people who deal with it. Image workers now deal directly in a world made of images, and can do so much faster than previously possible. But production has also become mixed up with circulation to the point of being indistinguishable. The factory/studio/tumblr blur with online shopping, oligarch collections, realty branding and surveillance architecture. Today's workplace could turn out to be a rogue algorithm commandeering your hard drive, eyeballs and dreams. And tomorrow you might have to disco all the way to insanity.

As the web spills over into a different dimension, image production moves way beyond the confines of specialised fields. It becomes mass postproduction in an age of crowd creativity. Today, almost everyone is an artist. We are pitching, phishing, spamming, chain-liking or mansplaining. We are twitching, tweeting and toasting as some form of solo relational art, high on dual processing and a smartphone flat rate. Image circulation today works by pimping pixels in orbit via strategic sharing of wacky, neo-tribal, and mostly US-American content. Improbable objects, celebrity cat GIFs, and a jumble of unseen anonymous images proliferate and waft through human bodies via Wi-Fi. One could perhaps think of the results as a new and vital form of folk art – that is if one is prepared to completely overhaul one's definition of folk as well as art. A new form of storytelling using emojis and tweeted rape threats is both creating and tearing apart communities loosely linked by shared attention deficit.

Circulationism

But these things are not as new as they seem. What the Soviet avant-garde of the twentieth century called productivism – the claim that art should enter

production and the factory – could now be replaced by circulationism. Circulationism is not about the art of making an image, but of postproducing, launching, and accelerating it. It is about the public relations of images across social networks, about advertisement and alienation, and about being as suavely vacuous as possible.

But remember how productivists Mayakovsky and Rodchenko created billboards for NEP sweets? Communists eagerly engaging with commodity fetishism?[18] Crucially, circulationism, if reinvented, could also be about short-circuiting existing networks, circumventing and bypassing corporate friendship and hardware monopolies. It could become the art of recoding or rewiring the system by exposing state scopophilia, capital compliance and wholesale surveillance. Of course, it might also just go as wrong as its predecessor, by aligning itself with a Stalinist cult of productivity, acceleration and heroic exhaustion. Historic productivism was – let's face it – totally ineffective and defeated by an overwhelming bureaucratic apparatus of surveillance/workfare early on. And it is quite likely that circulationism – instead of restructuring circulation – will just end up as ornament to an Internet that looks increasingly like a mall filled with nothing but Starbucks franchises personally managed by Joseph Stalin.

Will circulationism alter reality's hard- and software; its affects, drives and processes? While productivism left few traces in a dictatorship sustained by the cult of labour, could circulationism change a condition in which eyeballs, sleeplessness and exposure are an algorithmic factory? Are circulationism's Stakhanovites working in Bangladeshi like-farms,[19] or mining virtual gold in Chinese prison camps,[20] churning out corporate consent on digital conveyor belts?

Open Access

But here is the ultimate consequence of the Internet moving offline.[21] If images can be shared and

circulated, why can't everything else be too? If data moves across screens, so can its material incarnations move across shop windows and other enclosures. If copyright can be dodged and called into question, why can't private property? If one can share a restaurant dish JPEG on Facebook, why not the real meal? Why not apply fair use to space, parks and swimming pools?[22] Why only claim open access to JSTOR and not MIT – or any school, hospital or university for that matter? Why shouldn't data clouds discharge as storming supermarkets?[23] Why not open-source water, energy and Dom Pérignon champagne?

If circulationism is to mean anything, it has to move into the world of offline distribution, of 3D dissemination of resources, of music, land and inspiration. Why not slowly withdraw from an undead Internet to build a few others next to it?

This text was originally published in e-flux journal, *no. 49, 2013*.
http://www.e-flux.com/journal/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/

1 This is what the term 'post-internet', coined a few years ago by Marisa Olson and subsequently Gene McHugh, seemed to suggest while it had undeniable use value as opposed to being left with the increasingly privatised exchange value it has at this moment.

2 Cf. Peter Weibel, "Medien als Maske: Videokratie," in *Von der Bürokratie zur Telekratie. Rumänien im Fernsehen*, ed. Keiko Sei (Berlin: Merve, 1990), 124–149, 134f.

3 Cătălin Gheorghe, "The Juridical Rewriting of History," in *Trial/Proces*, ed. Cătălin Gheorghe (Iaşi: Universitatea de Arte "George Enescu" Iaşi, 2012), 2–4.

4 Ceci Moss and Tim Steer in a stunning exhibition announcement: 'The object that exists in motion spans different points, relations and existences but always remains the same thing. Like the digital file, the bootlegged copy, the icon, or Capital, it reproduces, travels and accelerates, constantly negotiating the different supports that enable its movement. As it occupies these different spaces and forms it is always reconstituting itself. It doesn't have an autonomous singular existence; it is only ever activated within the network of nodes and channels of transportation. Both a distributed process and an independent occurrence, it is like an expanded object ceaselessly circulating, assembling and dispersing. To stop it would mean to break the whole process, infrastructure or chain that propagates and reproduces it.' (Seventeen Gallery, 2012).

5 One instance of a wider political phenomena called transition. Coined for political situations in Latin America and then applied to Eastern European contexts after 1989, this notion described a teleological process consisting of an impossible catch-up of countries "belatedly" trying to achieve democracy and free-market economies. Transition implies a continuous morphing process, which in theory would make any place ultimately look like the ego ideal of any default Western nation. As a result, whole regions were subjected to radical makeovers. In practice, transition usually meant rampant expropriation coupled with a radical decrease in life expectancy. In transition, a bright neoliberal future marched off the screen to be realised as a lack of health care coupled with personal bankruptcy, while Western banks and insurance companies not only privatised pensions, but also reinvested them in contemporary art collections.

6 Images migrating across different supports are of course nothing new. This process has been apparent in art-making since the Stone Age. But the ease with which many images morph into the third dimension is a far cry from ages when a sketch had to be carved into marble manually. In the age of postproduction, almost everything made has been created by means of one or more images, and any IKEA table is copied and pasted rather than mounted or built.

7 As the New Aesthetic tumblr has brilliantly demonstrated for things and landscapes (http://new-aesthetic.tumblr.com), and as the Women as Objects tumblr has done to illustrate the incarnation of image as female body (http://womenasobjects.tumblr.com). Equally relevant on this point is work by Jesse Darling and Jennifer Chan.

8 See Steven Shaviro's wonderful analysis in "Post-Cinematic Affect: On Grace Jones, Boarding Gate and Southland Tales," *Film-Philosophy* 14.1 (2010), 1–102. See also his book *Post-Cinematic Affect* (London: Zero Books, 2010).

9 Greg Allen, "The Enterprise School," *Greg.org*, Sept. 13, 2013, accessed March 2014, http://greg.org/archive/2013/09/13/the_enterprise_school.html

10 Jalal Toufic, *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Catastrophe* (Forthcoming Books, 2009). http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads/Jalal_Toufic,_The_Withdrawal_of_Tradition_Past_a_Surpassing_Disaster.pdf

11 Metahaven, "The Cloud, the State, and the Stack: Metahaven in Conversation with Benjamin Bratton," (undated). Accessed March 2014, http://mthvn.tumblr.com/post/38098461078/thecloudthestateandthestack

12 Thanks to Josh Crowe for drawing my attention to this.

13 Metahaven, "The Cloud, the State, and the Stack."

14 Oliver Laric, "Versions," 2012. Accessed March 2014. http://oliverlaric.com/vversions.htm

15 Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1999), 75–82. "In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.' Suárez

Miranda, Viajes de varones prudentes, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lérida, 1658.'

16 L. Arlas, "Verbal spat between Costa Rica, Nicaragua continues," *Tico Times*, Sept. 20, 2013. Thanks to Kevan Jenson for mentioning this to me.

17 Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 166–184.

18 Christina Kiaer, "'Into Production!': The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism," *Transversal*, Sept, 2010. 'Mayakovsky's advertising jingles address working-class Soviet consumers directly and without irony; for example, an ad for one of the products of Mossel'prom, the state agricultural trust, reads: 'Cooking oil. Attention working masses. Three times cheaper than butter! More nutritious than other oils! Nowhere else but Mossel'prom.' It is not surprising that Constructivist advertisements would speak in a pro-Bolshevik, anti-NEP-business language, yet the picture of the *Reklam-Konstruktoradvertising* business is more complicated. Many of their commercial graphics move beyond this straightforward language of class difference and utilitarian need to offer a theory of the socialist object. In contrast to Brik's claim that in this kind of work they are merely 'biding their time', I propose that their advertisements attempt to work out the relation between the material cultures of the prerevolutionary past, the NEP present and the socialist novyi byt of the future with theoretical rigor. They confront the question that arises out of the theory of Boris Arvatov: What happens to the individual fantasies and desires organised under capitalism by the commodity fetish and the market, after the revolution?'

19 Charles Arthur, "How low-paid workers at 'click farms' create appearance of online popularity," *The Guardian*, Aug. 2, 2013.

20 Harry Sanderson, "Human Resolution," *Mute*, 2013, accessed March 2014, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/human-resolution

21 And it is absolutely not getting stuck with data-derived sculptures exhibited in white cube galleries.

22 "Spanish workers occupy a Duke's estate and turn it into a farm," *Libcom.org*, Aug. 24, 2012. 'Earlier this week in Andalusia, hundreds of unemployed farm workers broke through a fence that surrounded an estate owned by the Duke of Segorbe, and claimed it as their own. This is the latest in a series of farm occupations across the region within the last month. Their aim is to create a communal agricultural project, similar to other occupied farms, in order to breathe new life into a region that has an unemployment rate of over 40 percent. Addressing the occupiers, Diego Canamero, a member of the Andalusian Union of Workers, said that: 'We're here to denounce a social class who leave such a place to waste.' The lavish well-kept gardens, house, and pool are left empty, as the Duke lives in Seville, more than 60 miles away.'

23 Thomas J. Michalak, "Mayor in Spain leads food raids for the people," *Workers.org*, Aug. 25, 2012, accessed March 2014, http://www.workers.org/2012/08/24/mayor-in-spain-leads-food-raids-for-the-people/. 'In the small Spanish town of Marinaleda, located in the southern region of Andalusía, Mayor Juan Manuel Sánchez Gordillo has an answer for the country's economic crisis and the hunger that comes with it: He organised and led the town's residents to raid supermarkets to get the food necessary to survive.'


STRIKE







Sven Lütticken

Hito Steyerl: Postcinematic Essays after the Future

1. From Objectivity to Objecthood

The much-vaunted 'end of history' may be an ideological phantasm, but there is such a thing as the end of the future – or, at least, a crisis of futurity.[1] In *After the Future*, Franco "Bifo" Berardi has focused not on the year 1989 and the fall of Actually Existing Communism, but on 1977 as a year when the future ended – when a certain modern western conception of the future as a linear, progressive development came to an end.[2] Of course, the 1970s saw an increasing awareness of the finitude of growth (oil crisis, ecology), coupled with both the gradual dissolution or marginalisation of late 1960s New Left and the introduction of neoliberal economic and military "shock therapy", most noticeably in Chile.[3] By 1977, as Bifo notes, we have the RAF campaign resulting in the "German Autumn", the rise of punk and its "No Future" slogan, as well as the Autonomia movement in Italy (in which Bifo himself was involved), which hurled the untenable Marxist-Leninist belief in the proletariat as the sole emancipatory agent of history overboard, choosing instead to develop new forms of social (re)composition – in the form of various micro-political movements.[4]

Hito Steyerl, too, has identified 1977 as the moment when 'the short decade of the New Left violently comes to an end,' using David Bowie's *Heroes* and the Stranglers' *No More Heroes* as pop-cultural indications of this shift.[5] In the film *November* (2004), this period is 'the time after October, a time when revolution seems to be over and peripheral struggles have become particular, localist, and almost impossible to communicate. In *November* a new reactionary form of terror has taken over which abruptly breaks with the tradition of October.' *November* – in which Steyerl attempts to retrace the story of her teenage friend Andrea Wolf, who later became a freedom fighter/terrorist for the Kurdish PKK – contains footage that might be termed documentary, but it is not a

documentary per se. Leaping from the personal to the world-historical and from one type of image to another – from Eisenstein's *October* to martial arts movies and the unfinished film Steyerl and Wolf worked on in their youth – *November* is an essay film par excellence.[6]

Steyerl writes, films and performs essays, with their various articulations (sometimes under the same title) bolstering and enriching each other.[7] To essay is to try, to attempt. The essay is a form of doubt – a format in which one can explore doubtful theses. While the essay is at its root a literary genre, in the twentieth century it leapt into new media. The transition from the printed page to film was a haphazard process, and its conceptualisation even more so. In the 1920s, the protagonists of the Soviet montage school conceived of film as a dialectical and historical medium with no rival: filmic montage could unite seemingly disparate shots, such as dialectical thesis and antithesis, and thereby not merely illustrate the march of history but actively participate in it.

The notion of the essay film or film essay was originally proposed by Hans Richter as an alternative for both feature films and conventional documentaries – as a continuation of documentary film by other means.[8] While Richter's text, published in a Swiss newspaper in 1940, is strenuously apolitical, this abstention from explicit politics is itself highly significant. Richter had collaborated with Sergei Eisenstein in the 1920s, but the rise of Fascism and Stalinism had dashed any hopes of a quick breakthrough into the bright future. Under the circumstances, as October was sliding into November, it made sense to reinvent film, reinvent montage, in essayistic terms – to see if the cinematic medium might not at least find ways for temporality prying open the stolid realism of documentaries.

While Richter's text remained obscure, the notion of the film essay was reinvented around 1970 by theorists and filmmakers who advocated a film practice

that would – through montage – develop ideas rather than pretend to "show reality" or reveal "the truth" in an objective manner.[9] But how do ideas develop? Only if the filmmaker-essayist puts his or her subjectivity on the line, allows for conceptual jump cuts that may not, strictly speaking, be justifiable.

Steyerl's written essays are not "explanations" of her films. Even when they share a title, as with *In Free Fall* (a 2010 film and 2011 article), their relation is one of mutual complementation and contradiction – with the article following a more abstract trajectory of speculation. In contrast to the wide-ranging text, the film focuses on the "lives" of Boeing airplanes – leading us from the Israeli army to an airplane junkyard in the Mojave Desert – is rife with the artist's bold, but deftly executed conceptual jumps. Referencing Sergei Tretyakov's 1929 "The Biography of the Object," as well as the stock market crash of that year, the 30-minute short combines shots from the airplane junkyard with Steyerl and the film's small cast of motley characters, interspersed with found documentary/ propaganda footage explaining how airplanes are reused for aluminium (either scrapped and recycled for DVD production, or whole crafts used for cinematic explosions such as in the blockbuster, *Speed*).

Another twist in the film's gathering of histories and biographies, tells us that 1929 was not only the year of the stock market crash and Tretyakov's text, but also as the year Howard Hughes's aviation epic *Hell's Angels* was shot, which saw Hughes crash and seriously injure himself. Later, Hughes bought TWA and the plane blown up for *Speed* is one of TWA's old Boeings, which spent part of its life in the Israeli airforce as 4X-JYI. Its sister plane, 4X-JYD, was present at the storming of the hijacked plane at Entebbe, and now functions as a cinema in an Israeli army museum, while 4X-JYI was blown up in *Speed.* 'Everything that was left was scrap, and that's when the Chinese were buying scrap.'

Steyerl's entropic airfield dissolves in a post-cinematic montage indebted to MTV; new footage and appropriated footage generate a dizzying, fragmented map unfolding in non-linear and multifaceted time. The editing – tied together with catchy tunes – is seductive to the point of glossing over its own intricacies, making the film feel more accessible than it might actually be. While it would indeed appear that with *In Free Fall*, Steyerl 'has turned from the essayistic subject to the essayistic object,' it may be more precise to say that the film focuses on objects as having a certain derivative and secondary *agency* that affects human lives.[10] Depending on market fluctuations, planes may be used for movie productions or be sold to China for their scrap metal. *In Free Fall* does not fetishise the social relations between things; both object and subject act and are acted on in a bewilderingly complex political economy (Steyerl's cameraman lost his Hollywood job partly because of the crash in the DVD market due to online streaming and filesharing).

In Steyerl's work, objects liquefy while subjects can solidify into objectified images. The film *Lovely Andrea* (2007), for example, in which Steyerl retraced her short-lived career as a bondage photo model in Japan cuts from images of tied-up models to footage of Spiderman casting his nets – and the Twin Towers, which featured in a hastily withdrawn trailer for *Spiderman*. Yet with her and the other bondage models becoming flesh sculptures, *Lovely Andrea* also sees the filmmaker become an object – an image-object modelled by other "artists."

In her text "A Thing Like You and Me" (2010), a prime example of Steyerl's jump-cut essayism, the artist observes that David Bowie with his constantly changing looks and personas is 'no longer a subject, but an object: a thing, an image, a splendid fetish,' and 'a commodity soaked with desire.'[11] This prompts Steyerl to pose the question: 'What happens to identification at this point?

Who can we identify with? Of course, identification is always with an image. But ask anybody if they'd actually like to be JPEG file. And this is precisely my point: if identification is to go anywhere, it has to be with this material aspect of the image…'[12] Elsewhere, she has noted that '[despite] its apparently immaterial nature, digital wreckage remains firmly anchored within material reality.'[13] In other words: the storm of history rages on, resulting in entropic debris. But rather than developing a Robert Smithson-like scenario wherein everything veers towards an ultimate state of entropic sameness and frozen stasis, Steyerl sketches a kind of junkspace – and junktime – in which movement abounds, in which images are frenetically circulating, de- and recontextualised, morphed and reformatted.

Subjects as images, images as objects; in her wonderfully messy 2013 film *How Not to Be Seen. A Fucking Didactic Educational .Mov File*, Steyerl performs various options for going un-detected in the age of total surveillance. These include 'becoming an image', chameleon-like, and 'becoming a pixel' – since what does not exceed the side of a single pixel cannot be zoomed in on. ('Happy pixels hop off into low resolution.') Various scenes show performers wearing a kind of green screen burka – which would allow them to become part of the background – and we see people wearing pixel-boxes over their heads. These are not serious proposals for fooling the NSA or Google, but they are nonetheless reminders that we all are data-objects and we'd better start acting on that knowledge.

In our allegedly "visual culture", what really matters are not the images but *the subjects that are entangled in the images* – even as we are looking, we are being looked at, or being read, or being scanned. Images now function as traps in a way that Lacan never envisaged; they lure us in and mine us for data. In turn, we become both visible and legible, but not necessarily for human eyes –we become *scannable*.[14]

2. Circulation and Speculation

In Steyerl's recent video *Liquidity Inc.* (2014), subject and object finally appear equally enmeshed in a dialectic of liquefaction and solidification; of liquidation and crystallization. *Liquidity Inc.* 'is all about these stages of transition between different states of matter: between water, ice, capital, sweat, leaks, polygons, liquid crystal and how they are being incorporated as bodies and then keep transforming over and over again.'[15]

The video portrays Jacob Wood, who during the economic crash left the financial sector and started a career in the world of Mixed Martial Arts (a.k.a. cage fighting). However, Wood as subject of this film is constantly engulfed by digitally rendered water, appearing underneath his feet or on a monitor behind him. (In *In Free Fall*, Steyerl had already digitally edited footage onto a laptop screen, as if to underline the obsolescence of her cameraman's Hollywood craft). In *Liquidity Inc.*, Wood and Steyerl speculate on water travelling through the cosmos and constituting human bodies, on financial liquidity and the weather. 'Be like water, my friend': the cage fighter needs to be fluid and flexible just like his neoliberal, financial trading counterpart. Steyerl too had to go with the flow. The film includes an online exchange between her, co-author Brian Kuan Wood and curator David Riff, revealing that part of the budget had evaporated and that Steyerl could no longer hire digital FX experts to do the water effects. She now had to follow tutorials and learn to do it herself, delaying the completion of the film in the process.

During a "weather report" presented by the artist's camouflaged daughter, an insert shows a clip with an orgone gun firing at the sky, from Kate Bush's music video *Cloudbusting*.[16] 'The Weather Underground is busting corporate clouds using orgnone cannons.' Privatized clouds – the phrase neatly encapsulates not only the storage of virtually all our information in data clouds, but also the selling off of the commons in a "free

market" economy in which everything (water included) is embued with the promise of a quick return, regardless of long-term costs. The weather reports of *Liquidity Inc*. suggest a global interdependence across different systems or ecologies.[17] As Berardi has put it,

> *The increasing [*sic*] mental nature of production has exposed the economic system more and more to the psychic storms that are crisscrossing the collective mind. And on the other hand, the economy has caused competitive sentiments that have been transformed into anxiety, and at times degenerate into forms of panic. Financial and psychic flows are closely interdependent.*[18]

On German TV, the weather report and a financial report live from the Frankfurt stock exchange are broadcast in quick succession before the 8 p.m. TV news, with the financial report functioning very much like a daily update on market depression, storms and high-pressure areas. And in fact, now that the weather increasingly seems to behave in a more volatile manner as climate change becomes part of daily life rather than theoretical speculation, Steyerl suggests that the global ecosystem is also interconnected with the human psyche and with the financial system – almost like an update of Charles Fourier's thesis on the 'material deterioration of the planet' caused by the *désordre passionnel* of capitalist society.[19] As the masked weathergirl in *Liquidity Inc*. puts it: 'A breeze would start to blow, if you could just finally manage to focus.'

The title of *Liquidity Inc*. is a reference to Derrida's *Limited Inc.* (1988), in which the French philosopher critiques the 'speech act theory' of pragmatists such as J.L. Austin, the author of *How to Do Things with Words* (1962); the book also contains Derrida's response to Searle, who had defended Austin and attacked Derrida. As Steyerl puts it,

Derrida scoffs at Searle´s pragmatic view of what language does, establishing contracts, marriages and such: in his view it is impossible to predict or fully control what language does. It does do something, but who knows what? The same happens with the incorporation of the digital. Who knows what happens if the Dow Jones and the weather were linked via systems of structural instability and how one might affect the other – or not. We might want to reconsider both Derrida's and Searle's questions in relation to code too: code definitely does something – but do we really know what it is? What the hell does high frequency trading really do? What are these bots doing chatting with one another and spamming each other into machinic oblivion or ecstasy?[20]

Steyerl effectively pits one form of speculation against another: a kind of hyper-speculative reasoning legitimised by the essay form against the speculative logic of hyper-capitalism. In fact, as the Uncertain Commons collective has argued, capitalist modernity is marked by a dialectic between what they call *firmative* and *affirmative* speculation. The former is speculation in the service of control, of predicting and managing the future –spanning effectively the whole financial system with all its authorities, services and products to organizations such as the WHO and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Firmative speculation produces probable states as calculable alternatives wrapped in investment contrasts (futures, options, swaps) and choices for individual portfolios. Such packaging forecloses alternative possibilities in the interest of a precise rate of return.[21]

However, today's global condition actually manifests itself as 'a heterogeneous accumulation of unplanned and unprecedented effects' – with insurance companies such as Swiss Re even trying to manage weather instability by providing "weather derivatives" that allow companies to insure themselves against severe weather.[22] While the insurance sector has long been aware of the dangers of climate change, these circumstances might lead to an accumulation of risk that is too extreme for insurance, incapable of being contained by managerial speculation.

What is needed – now more than ever – is affirmative speculation that sabotages the exploitation of potential for quick profit and 'concern[s] itself with an uncertainty that must not be reduced to manageable quantities.'[23] This is where art and the essay enter stage left. But there is no reason to romanticise the artistic-essayistic complex. Many forms of art now function as investment, as materialised futures, with collectors banking on an artist's career. Whilst this is a very different art world to the one Steyerl inhabits, Steyerl's practice has been accused of being all too compatible with a project-based cultural economy in which the essay has become a post-Fordist imperative – life as a project. Is Steyerl's essayism not all too free-floating, too much of a virtuoso exercise to generate page clicks in the *e-flux journal* and survive the social Darwinism of biennales? Is the essay, this protean form, not all too perfectly adapted for liquid capitalism?[24] *Liquidity Inc*. takes this as a given, and in fact Steyerl herself was the first to note that in the age of flexibility and "just-in-time" production, essayism can also be a form of conformism.[25] Any practice worth its salt runs (and courts) risks. Rather than downplaying the problematic and conformist side of her artistic essayism, Steyerl exacerbates it, and pushes the firmative speculation that is inherent in any practice within today's cultural sector to the tipping point.

In her new piece *Shunga* (2014), Steyerl has "glitched" animated GIFs of pornographic Japanse woodcuts called *shunga* (images of Spring) by inserting 'absurd online advice on how to make Spring come faster (or at all)' into the code.[26] 'This ranges from moving Earth closer to Jupiter to decreeing the coming of Spring by law, gardening, revolutionary or erotic advice.'[27] Steyerl's practice here recalls Kenneth Goldmith's exhortation to 'parse the new illegibility' by treating digital files as writing, as texts to be appropriated and detourned.[28] Rewriting images in this manner is *circulationism* in action: if Soviet productivism called for artists to design products for the nascent communist industry, circulationism is not about making, but about revelling in the possibilities of postproduction. As Steyerl notes, circulationism is also entangled with today's neoliberal version of the 'Stalinist cult of productivity, acceleration, and heroic exhaustion.'[29] The phenomenon is, then, suffused with speculation in its different forms and modalities. We are all circulationists, and Steyerl's work begins to address the consequences of such a state of play.

3. Going Live

Steyerl's essayism is marked by an engagement with what Heinrich Heine once called the 'material activity of the brain' in the age of its digital reformatting.[30] It is a form of early twenty-first century materialism: a materialist praxis that never deals with mere subjects in the sense of "themes", but rather the subject as maker and consumer – circulator – of images, who is also always producing and circulating as image. Thus the artist herself is an instable subject-object, and her *Versuch* is a *Selbstversuch* in the free fall of history. In circulationism, images exist to be performed (repeated and remade) in some manner; and post-producing images means that one constantly performs and re-performs the digital source material.[31] After all,

image, sound or text files are nothing without being played — performed — in some manner. So why not do this by talking the audience through whatever images one can scavenge or footage one can shoot cheaply?

Steyerl's lecture-performance *I Dreamed a Dream: Politics in the Age of Mass Art Production* (2013) is a live essay that shares traits with both the artist's written and video forms.[32] Accompanied by projected images, the artist articulately speculates on the phenomenon of 'mass art production' and whether it could change the world as much as the mass production of arms. Steyerl begins by mentioning Comrade X: a Kurdish fighter imprisoned in Turkey, who became fascinated with *Les Misérables* as a political work of art, for which he wanted to write a sequel. Steyerl dryly remarks that this should be sufficient proof that she didn't make up Comrade X, as she clearly never would have chosen *Les Misérables* – that sentimental proto-telenovela with all its cliffhangers.

In fact, in contrast to Comrade X, Steyerl focuses not so much on the book's pseudo-revolutionary content but on its productive logic as manifested in its form – which was shaped by 19th century newspaper serials and the modes of production and consumption they generated. Steyerl here foregrounds the impact of this nascent culture industry, recalling Marx's statement that, 'Production thus produces not only the object but also the manner of consumption, not only objectively but also subjectively. Production thus creates the consumer.'[33] What it also brings into being is the producer him- or herself. But in contemporary immaterial labour, the dividing line between production and consumption is of course tenuous at best – as in the case of "ordinary people" who get up from their sofas and audition to be the next "idols" whom we cheer on every Saturday night.

Like the works of the "real" feuilleton hacks with whom Hugo had to compete, Steyerl notes that *Les*

Misérables reads a little like a permanent public audition by the author; completing the novel check by check, the serial author 'rambles on commission' – the pitch has become part of the drama. From this, Steyerl cuts to Susan Boyle's performance of *I Dreamed a Dream* from the musical version of *Les Misérables* (the hopeless dream of Fantine, the tragic working mother) on a British talent show – forging a *now-time* between the 1832 failed revolution portrayed by Hugo and the situation of the 2011 precariat. There is another species of *miserables* around – they are onstage, as losers mocked by posh juries.

We live in a casting economy, in which we constantly pitch projects and ourselves; images of artists in Berlin cuing up outside after a call for an "open" exhibition by the Deutsche Bank art space are projected behind Steyerl, before she moves on to imagining and performing a pitch for a project on the basis of Comrade X's dream, which she reads in front of a karaoke screen with lyrics to *I Dreamed a Dream* (accompanied by music). The proposed project involves a green-screen montage of people in nineteenth century and contemporary museum architecture, with a rabble of post-Fordist extras who are about to be slaughtered on barricades. In this bizarre scenario, we, the audience, become a quasi-jury, complicit in the culture of permanent auditioning.

This culture of permanent performance is also one of permanent surveillance, in which 'becoming invisible' is ever more of a challenge – a crazy form of speculation that no sane investor would ever back. 'Passively and often voluntarily, one collaborates in one's own surveillance and data-mining,' as Jonathan Crary has put it.[34] In this situation, Crary rightly argues,

> *To be preoccupied with the aesthetic properties of digital imagery, as are many theorists and critics, is to evade the subordination of the image*

to a broad field of non-visual operations and requirements. Most images are now produced and circulated in the service of maximising the amount of time spent in habitual forms of individual self-management and self-regulation.[35]

Culture has been "gamified", and in the process it has been militarised. In the age of digital effects and 3D, what was once cinema is embroiled in an arms race, against which the Cold War pales in comparison. With the digital blockbuster, cinema has been remade in the image of video games that were in turn civilian adaptations of military flight simulators. The 'military-entertainment complex' has only become stronger now that, as Steyerl puts it, 'in 3D cinema, the new characteristics of aerial views are fully exploited by staging vertiginous flights into abysses,' and 'military, surveillance, and entertainment applications are integrated ever more completely.'[36] Against the military-entertainment complex of James Cameron's *Avatar*, in which we enjoy our own submission to a culture of shock and awe, Steyerl enacts a disarming sleight of hand that doubles as pure speculation, seemingly realising an impossible and excessive potential beyond all probability and calculation. A video that is part of Steyerl and Rabih Mroué's lecture/performance Probable *Title: Zero Probability* (2012) shows the artist facing the camera, she tosses a coin into the air, explaining that the chances of heads and tails are each 50%, and that the probability of the coin never coming down is zero. Of course, the coin does not come down. In a move that recalls trick films of early cinema, Steyerl produces a questionable miracle – pushing us to speculate on the conditions of its (non-)occurrence.[37]

In her solo lecture/performance *The Body of the Image* (2012), Steyerl returned to her friend Andrea Wolf and her supposed death in a cave where she was presumably killed by Turkish troops.[38] A 3D mapping of

the cave goes wrong and produces a warped space full of blind spots: a 'digital hallucination' not suitable for mapping forensic evidence. In such a 3D reconstruction, missing bodies can get lost all over again – just as a coin may suddenly decide never to come down (probability be damned). If the latter is a trick that would have been possible even in early cinema, the hallucinatory potential of contemporary postcinematic imaging technology is even greater.

During the same talk, Steyerl notes that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was actually proclaimed in a 2D cinema in 1943, and that this cinema was destroyed during a fight between Croatians and Bosnians in 1992. 'I think cinema as such got mortally wounded in that fight and never recovered.'[39] However, (un)dead cinema survives as event. If in today's 3D blockbuster the event is created by the technology of immersion, which helps turn the films into quasi-games giving you vertiginous perspectives as you plunge off a cliff with the hero, the "eventualization" of Steyerl's practice takes the form of a live performance of her material.

I Dreamed a Dream and *The Body of the Image*, have not been developed into video essays. Instead, Steyerl chose to combine a projection of still and moving images with a live lecture – or rather, with a performance in the guise of a lecture. And while the budgets for Hollywood blockbusters soar in the quest for the perfect "event movie", Steyerl finds that her budgets – which were never massive to begin with – have evaporated. *Liquidity Inc*. foregrounds its status as a digital artifact that has lost the arms race: the budget did not stretch to hiring a professional for the aquatic effects, so Steyerl had to teach herself to do it. In the ongoing financial crisis, everybody wants to show her films, but nobody wants to finance them.

And of course, art institutions are happy to invite artists to give talks, to present her work. In the process, the artist has to mobilise and liquefy herself,

stepping onto the podium to engage in a highly peculiar form of Mixed Martial Arts. Under today's conditions, the audience becomes both potential surveillance instrument and circulationist accelerator – perhaps sending text messages, tweets and photos, and in the process making the work as unpredictable as the weather, and turning it into a perfect storm.

1 In a 1989 essay, reworked into a 1992 book, Francis Fukuyama famously presented his version of the Hegelian 'end of history': with the triumph of "Western liberal democracy" over Soviet Communism, there was no true historical antagonist of capitalist democracy left, signaling the end of the world-historical process.

2 Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *After the Future* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011), 44–50.

3 See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* (London: Penguin, 2007).

4 Berardi, 17, 46–48.

5 Hito Steyerl, "A Thing Like You and Me," in *e-flux journal* no. 15 (2010), accessed February 2014, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/a-thing-like-you-and-me/

6 On *November* see T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 74-89.

7 On Steyerl's most recent collection of essayistic texts, *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012); this volume collects essays from *e-flux journal*; see Tony Wood, "Reserve Armies of the Imagination," in: *New Left Review* 136 (July/August 2013), 136–142.

8 Hans Richter, "Der Filmessay: Eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms," in *Schreiben Bilder Sprechen: Texte zum essayistischen Film*, eds. Christa Blümlinger and Constantin Wulff (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1992), 195–198.

9 See Noël Burch, "Director's Notes," 2010, http://www.theforgottenspace.net/static/notes.html.

10 Kerstin Stakemeier, "Plane Destructive: The Recent Films of Hito Steyerl," in *Mute*, February 23, 2011, accessed February 2014, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/plane-destructive-recent-films-hito-steyerl

11 Steyerl, "A Thing Like You and Me".

12 Ibid.

13 Hito Steyerl, "Digital Debris: Spam and Scam," in *October* no. 138 (Fall 2011), 71.

14 Georges Didi-Huberman has long criticised the tendency (in iconology and elsewhere) to collapse *le visible* into *le lisible*, the visible into the legible. By now, both texts and images often function primarily as data to be scanned; the visible and *the* legible become the scannable. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'image* (Paris: Minuit, 1990), 21–64.

15 Steyerl quoted in Sven Lütticken, "Glitches of an Exhibition," interview with Hito Steyerl to be published in *Metropolis M* 35, no. 2 (2014).

16 Bush's song and music video *Cloudbusting* (1985) reference Wilhelm Reich and his "cloudbusters". A psychoanalysist, Reich during the 1930s transmuted the Freudian notion of the libido into a vitalist conception of cosmic energy that he named orgone.

The cloudbuster, by Reich from 1952 on, was a device consisting of metal pipes connected to a well or another body of water; when aimed at the sky, these pipes would act as a kind of lightning rod for orgone energy, enabling Reich to influence cloud formation and cloud dissipation in various ways. See Myron Sharaf, *Fury on Earth*: *A Biography of Wilhelm Reich* (Oxford: Da Capo Press, 1994): 378–383. While Sharaf is a believer in the literal truth of Reich's orgone theory, he is nonetheless a conscientious and perceptive biographer.

17 Building on Bateson's *Ecology of Mind*, Félix Guattari proposed an "ecosophy" revolving around the relations between 'three ecological registers": 'the environment, social relations and human subjectivity.' Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (1989), trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Continuum, 2008), 19–20 etc.

18 Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *Félix Guattari: Thought, Friendship, and Visionary Cartography*, trans. Giuseppina Mecchia and Charles J. Stivale (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 27.

19 See Charles Fourier, "Détérioration matérielle de la planète" (1820-21), in René Schérer, *L'Écosophie de Charles Fourier. Deux textes inédits* (Paris: Anthropos, 2001), 31–125. As with Reich, who cast Cold War fear of nuclear annihilation in the mythical form of DOR ("Deadly Orgone Radiation"), Fourier presents a mythico-romantic but at times strikingly perceptive take on the interdependence of human society and the planetary ecosystem.

20 Steyerl quoted in Lütticken, "Glitches of an Exhibition".

21 Uncertain Commons, *Speculate This!* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), chapter 2, http://speculatethis.pressbooks.com/chapter/firmative-speculation/. Thanks to Rachel O'Reilly and the participants of the Jan van Eyck's "Moving Images of Speculation" Inlab project for acquainting me with this text.

22 Uncertain Commons, *Speculate This!*, chapter 2; see also http://insurance.lbl.gov/opportunities.html

23 Uncertain Commons, *Speculate This!*, chapter 3, http://speculatethis.pressbooks.com/chapter/affirmative-speculation/.

24 In his lecture "Spatialized Essays: Learning to Live Without Speculation," at the Jan van Eyck "Moving Images of Speculation," Inlab, Friday, February 21, 2014, Thijs Witty observed that 'Much like speculative finance, the essay form is steeped in aquatic metaphors. It has for instance been widely noted that the essay is best understood as a protean form.'

25 Hito Steyerl, *Die Farbe der Wahrheit. Dokumentarismen im Kunstfeld* (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2008),139–142.

26 Steyerl quoted in Lütticken, "Glitches of an Exhibition".

27 Ibid.

28 Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

29 Hito Steyerl, "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?", in *e-flux journal* no. 49 (2013), accessed February 2014, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/.

30 See Heine's ironic characterisation of Jean Paul in *Die romantische Schule*: 'Instead of thought he gives us his thinking itself. We see the material activity of his brain; he gives us, as it were, more brain than thought.' Accessed February 2014, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/37478/37478-8.txt.

31 On the performing of digital files see also Boris Groys, "Religion in the Age of Digital Reproduction," *e-flux journal* no. 4 (2009), accessed February, 2014, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/religion-in-the-age-of-digital-reproduction/. However, in claiming that 'the digital file functions as an angel – as an invisible messenger transmitting a divine command,' Groys slides into

techno-idealism and neglects the file as matter or material that can be tampered with in a myriad ways.

32 *I Dreamed a Dream* was first performed at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin on March 18, 2013, and subsequently at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam on May 16, 2013.

33 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (1857), 92, accessed February 2014, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch01.htm.

34 Jonathan Crary, *24/7* (London/New York: Verso, 2013), 48.

35 Ibid., 47.

36 Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective," in *e-flux journal,* no. 24 (2011), accessed February 2014, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/.

37 *Probably Title: Zero Probabality* premiered at the Tanks at Tate Modern on October 6, 2012, and was subsequently performed or shown in a number of iterations – for which Steyerl could be replaced by another performer, or both Steyerl and Mroué by video images.

38 Hito Steyerl, *The Body of the Image*, lecture/performance at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, June 2, 2012.

39 The lecture script can be found at http://eipcp.net/e/projects/heterolingual/files/hitosteyerl/print.

ŞEHİT RONAHİ
(ANDREA WOLF)



Çatak Nordwestkurdistan 22.10.98

Die gefallenen Revolutionärinnen sind unsterblich!

EW NIKARIN ROJA ME TARÎBIKIN!


Was Renate, Monika
Christine, Heidi und Jutty
mit Bernd, Fred, Kurt,
Peter und Rolf so treiben -
und was Millionen andere
täglich auch wieben
Liebesspiele






The proletariat is international
or not at all.



SEHİT
ONARI

PROLETARIER,
LERNE DAS GEWEHR
ZU BEHERRSCHEN!

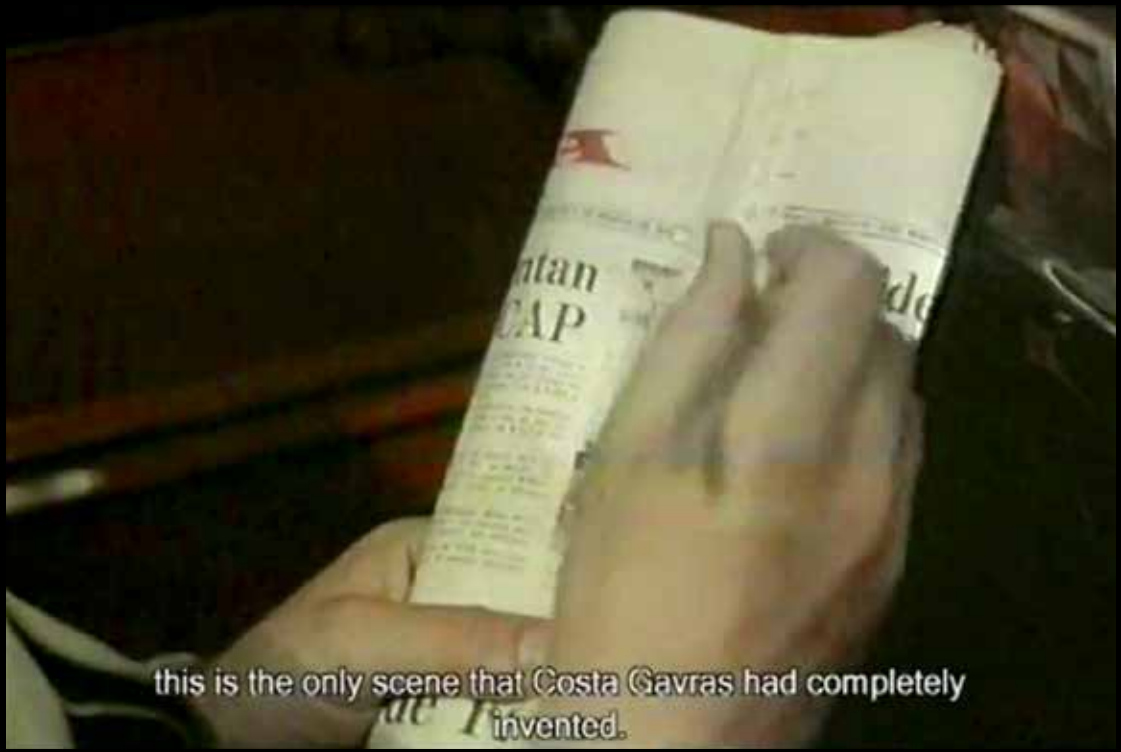
Proletarian, learn to master your gun!


160000 Turks live here, a third of them Kurds.


...and the PKK is advocating the principle that under the
harshest conditions there is always a way out...




Hongkong Standard
BILLY LO IS DEAD
BILLY LO DIES


this is the only scene that Costa Gavras had completely
invented.

Pablo Lafuente

In Praise of Populist Cinema. On Hito Steyerl's *November* and *Lovely Andrea*

In the early years of the French Revolution, the red flag was used as a sign of martial law, displayed by the gendarmerie to warn civilians that if they didn't disperse they would be shot at. But in July 1792 the Jacobin journalist Jean-Louis Carra printed on the flag in black letters, 'Martial Law of the Sovereign People against Rebellion by the Executive Power' – making the red flag the flag of revolution.[1]

Since that moment, and for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the colour red symbolised the fight against oppression and the pursuit of a social organisation based on the principle of equality. Today, however, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, red is again a sign of warning, opposed to the green of nature, of openness, of the originary and the authentic – and perhaps, too, of the market. What is perhaps the colour's keynote – disruption – still remains, but what is being disrupted has definitely changed. If red originally symbolised an end to disorder (that of the revolutionary masses) and later to a certain kind of order (of the State, or of capitalism), today it is again used to warn against disorders (of masses of illegal immigrants, of terror attacks and non-Western values) which threaten the social and productive relations of late capitalism.

This story of change in the meaning of a sign – of its appropriation and subsequent loss of position – is key to understanding how men and women organise (or disorganise) their life in common. Social structures and political struggles can be partially accounted for by means of such stories; signs and images are rejected, or adopted and articulated alongside other signs and images, in a manner that they contribute to, stabilise, destabilise or mobilise people as well as groups. In this process, as in Carra's case, agency and strategy can play an important role, but not necessarily, as signs often drift into different constellations, as if by chance.

What seems essential to these displacements of meaning is that the final articulation of a collection of signs and images, always in relation to specific

discourses, enables or reinforces a certain type of social and political practice, in opposition to others. An analysis of how this takes place should, in the last instance, provide tools for the construction of those articulations that facilitate specific political goals. Additionally, that analysis should be articulated and distributed in such a way that guarantees that everyone who has access to it could perhaps contribute to the cause of an egalitarian, emancipatory politics – as exploitation always comes with either the obscuring of the mechanisms that support and reinforce it, or a disbelief in the possibility that things could be different.

Hito Steyerl's video *November* (2004) tells the story of one of these images – that of her youth friend Andrea Wolf – and its drift from B-movie kung fu fighter status to that of a martyr of the Kurdish liberation movement. An in-betweener, Andrea is an 'attractive' woman (as the film's voiceover says) and a friend; a female fighter in a fictional story (who uses martial arts instead of weapons) and an armed revolutionary (who also teaches martial arts to her fellow female fighters); a martyr for the Kurdish cause (executed by the Turkish security forces) and a terrorist in hiding (according to the Turkish and German governments). Her two names (Andrea Wolf and Şehit Ronahî, which she adopted when joining the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK) already signify these shifts. And while this change in name was her choice, the extent of the transformations of her own image was not. As *November* shows, the destiny of that image, paraded in the streets of Berlin next to PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan, was, from the moment it was captured (in photograph, film or video), out of her hands.

As a study of the image of a woman, situated in the context of a liberation movement (though it is not just that), *November* recalls Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin's 1972 film *Letter to Jane: An Investigation About a Still*, in which an image of Jane Fonda in Vietnam published in *L'Express* in 1972 is analysed, as the title suggests, in the form of a film-letter addressed

to the actress.[2] The film uses the picture to discuss, in the first place, how an image – Fonda's – is constructed, not only within the image itself (by the position of the actress within the frame, the angle of the camera or her expression of interest, concern and understanding); but also by the text that accompanies it (by a caption that describes a situation that is, in very simple terms, not necessarily the one that can be seen in the image, or by an accompanying essay that selectively refers to a wider context); and the way that these relate to the material conditions of its production and distribution.

Furthermore, and on equally important terms, the film reflects on the role of the filmmaker (or, in generic terms, the intellectual) within a political context. This is not done in order to respond to the question of what part the intellectual should play in revolution – Godard and Gorin dismiss this as a paralysing question that is not actually related to the revolution – but in order to *actually* play a part in it.[3] And this part is played by them through the asking of questions such as: what is important in an image? What does it show and what doesn't it? Is there a connection between what the image does and how it does it? And to what reactionary or revolutionary political ends?[4]

As a result of this investigation, an image that seemed fairly simple (a female Western celebrity engaging with a revolutionary cause and lending her image to it) is presented as a complex articulation of pictorial and discursive elements – a complexity that the authors identify with revolutionary positions, as described in the film using Fidel Castro's words: 'For revolutionaries there are never obvious truths. They are an invention of Imperialism.'

Letter to Jane was the last film Godard and Gorin made together as the radical film collective, Dziga Vertov Group. In 1970 Godard wrote a manifesto for El Fatah, in which he defined his position as a filmmaker (and, extensively, that of the Dziga Vertov Group) with the following words:

> *For us, currently militants within film practice, our tasks are still theoretical. To think in a different way in order to do the revolution… Each image and each sound, each combination of images and sounds, is an instance of relations of forces, and our task is to orientate those forces against those of our common enemy.*[5]

But the use of the notion of theory is equivocal here, if we are to understand by it something like pure, disinterested knowledge. Because, as Godard also writes, 'To make propaganda is to pose problems on a carpet. A film is a flying carpet that can travel anywhere. There is no magic. It is a political work.'[6] So any kind of analysis or enquiry – any posing of problems or asking of questions – is a function of a specific political goal, of an alignment with a specific position, made in response to a particular conjuncture.

The clarity of purpose suggested by Godard's words seems to belong, back in *November*, to what Hito Steyerl identifies in her film as 'the time of October' – the time of the revolution and of internationalism; the time when the enemy was easily identifiable; and when the political subject that fights it could be constructed without complication. As her film says, in 'the time of November' – our time, marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Real Socialism – revolution is impossible, as struggles are local and impossible to communicate, never mind universalise. This historical narrative, explicit within Steyerl's film, has often been used to characterise her work and to set it apart from earlier forms of politicised filmmaking. But, as Castro's words suggest, 'the time of October' as a time of clarity is perhaps the result of a similar construction to that of Jane Fonda's picture in Vietnam. Within *November*, the idea of 'October' as a time past – when revolution was possible – is not an accurate and nostalgic portrayal of the past, but an image of a fictional time that serves as a counterpoint to a current situation and inhabits it.[7] So then is now.

This 'complication' of time is, in *November*, parallel to a complication of space: the film recounts how, after the fall of the Wall, the GDR's military equipment was sold to Turkey and is now being used by the Turkish army in its war against the Kurdish independentists. A voiceover concludes that 'Kurdistan is also here [in Berlin].'

Such transposition, which was also present in Fonda's picture (taking French viewers to Vietnam), provides the title for another film by Godard – this time in collaboration with Anne-Marie Melville – *Ici et ailleurs* (1976). The film reworks footage, made by Godard and Gorin, for an unfinished film on the Palestine liberation movement titled, *Jusqu'à la victoire*. In *Ici et ailleurs*, the failure to portray the real fight in the original film exposes the strategies that documentary narrative necessarily relies on in order to produce an effect of reality.[8] The filmmakers' response to that failure is encapsulated in a very simple shift: in the initial sequences of the film, taken from the original Palestine footage, the camera shows fighters shooting their guns, and later we can only hear the gunshots, but not see them. In Steyerl's *November,* only the latter is possible, when, during the opening sequences, a similar sound can be heard. The soundtrack adopts a different meaning, when dissociated from the images, as do the images when robbed of their soundtrack. Perhaps because they never had it – like the scenes from Steyerl's early B movie included in *November*.

Cinema's combination of this two abilities – to make things speak and to serve as a space for self-reflection – makes it a typical product of Romantic poetics.[9] Images, both those shot by the filmmaker and those that he or she finds already made, are articulated in a way that they say something that the image itself would be unable or unwilling to say. And, at the same time, the author of that speech is allowed to explicitly reflect on his or her position in relation to it. (Although this also means that he or she is entitled to not do so.) Steyerl's films and videos are, like Godard's or Chris

Marker's work, exemplary cases of this type of poetics – they could be basically characterised as the articulation of seemingly disparate material through a montage that makes that material speak. But what makes Steyerl's work stand apart from that of other filmmakers – even Godard and Marker – is the extreme to which her films and videos develop this laying-bare of the author's relation to the work and its subject.

In *November,* this exposure happens through the presentation of an apparently truthful account of an autobiographical story, which is later exposed as partially staged. Whether it is fully staged or not, like the question about the role of the intellectuals in politics, is completely irrelevant. In *November*, Steyerl's voiceover talks about her old friend Andrea; the B-movie they made together; her reencounter with Andrea's image and the process of making the video (*November*) about her. But instead of presenting this as a guarantee of the veracity of her story, Steyerl shows footage of herself playing the 'sensitive, centred and understanding filmmaker,' in a PKK demonstration in Berlin on request from another documentary filmmaker. Such a gesture, not far from that of Fonda in her Vietnam picture, dismisses as dishonest any claim to truthfulness the work may have previously suggested.

Self-reflection is further displaced by Steyerl's voice saying that in November it is 'not I telling the story, but the story tells me,' as if to suggest that the filmmaker's agency is not the key factor to consider. And that is indeed the case, not because the voice is 'really told' by the story, but because *November* offers an image of Hito Steyerl as an attractive woman; as an engaged filmmaker; as the young friend of Andrea… causing her image to go through the same process as Andrea's in the film.[10]

Steyerl's video *Lovely Andrea* (2007) continues to explore this motif, by showing the artist's quest to locate a bondage picture of herself, taken during the late 1980s, when she studied in Japan. The video is formally similar

to *November* in its combination of filmed footage and popular found material. However, this time, the exercise in self-reflection doesn't rely on Steyerl's voiceover but is dispersed through other voices. This strategy makes the 'Not I telling the story' – an echo of Gustave Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary, *c'est moi*' – an even more accurate description of the work.

This is due to the fact that, on the one hand, the protagonist of the video is arguably not Steyerl, but Asagi Ageha, an assistant to Steyerl in the work; her voice as translator in her interviews; and a self-suspension (bondage) performer. And, on the other, because as Edmund Burke said of *Tristram Shandy*, 'the story of the hero's life is the smallest part of the author's concern. The story is in reality made nothing more than a vehicle for satire on a great variety of subjects'.[11] Here, again, it is irrelevant whether Steyerl ever posed for that photographic shoot, or whether the image she ends up finding is hers. That story, which one of the interviewees calls a 'nice mystery novel', is not the purpose of the work. In fact, the work doesn't "know" what its purpose is – *Lovely Andrea* is framed, at its beginning and end, by the same question, addressed to Steyerl by a man off-frame: 'what is your film about?'

The 'great variety of subjects' that Steyerl deals with in the video include local and global structures of political control and domination; women's positions within those structures; the constructed nature of documentary images; the modes of availability of images through video and the World Wide Web; the commercial value of those images (including artworks); and the subversive potential of submission and role-play. Lovely Andrea jumps from one to the other – from the Japanese bondage industry to Guantánamo to Spiderman to Abu Ghraib – in a manner suggesting that any connection made is based as much on analysis as, again like in *Tristram Shandy*, on wit. That makes for a fast-pace, highly entertaining video – spiced with a soundtrack of extremely popular songs by the likes

of Depeche Mode, X-Ray Spex, Pet Shop Boys, Donna Summer and The Spinners.

Perhaps this relation to popular culture – expressed in singular elements within the work as well as montage – even more than the extreme self-reflection of her films and videos, distinguished Steyerl's work from other attempts at politicised filmmaking. Although elements of popular culture can often be found in this type of work – most remarkably in Godard's films – it is often treated in such a way as suggests a certain reluctance to engage with its potentially political effect. This is possibly due to the coalescing of such material with a culture industry which perpetuates domination and exploitation. But Steyerl seems to embrace them with joy.

In her work, Steyerl recognises the nature of popular elements. For example, in November, when the she identifies the big-breasted women from Russ Meyer's 1965 film, *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*, as the role model for the B movie she made with Andrea – which she also calls an 'incredibly tacky film'. But that doesn't keep her from acknowledging that these were some of the few role models of strong women of whom she and Andrea were aware of at the time. So, regardless of the original function of images, they can work as effective tools. Or, rather, precisely because of their availability and appeal within a popular culture realm, they *must* be approached as tools within an ideological struggle.

The use of popular culture in a political programme of emancipation echoes a discussion that took place during that constructed time of 'October' – a discussion about Proletkult. As Vladimir Ilyich Lenin wrote in 1920, in order to aid the revolution, it is necessary to elaborate a 'proletarian culture' that absorbs from the previously-existing one elements that bear the imprint of a common humanity. This should be done,

> *Not [through] the invention of a new proletarian culture, but the development of the best models, traditions and results of the existing culture, from*

the point of view of the Marxist world outlook and the conditions of life and struggle of the proletariat in the period of its dictatorship.[12]

Crucially, this process involves a transformation or "recasting" of those elements. Essential to this understanding of revolutionary cultural production is a rejection of the idea that there is a necessary connection between ideological elements (for example, those of popular culture) and the dominant class. Ideological elements can't be understood as a function of the class in power. And not, as Étienne Balibar suggests, because ideological elements (such as justice, fairness and equality) need to originate in the exploited classes in order to become universal in a common imaginary; but because only *specific articulations* of several ideological elements (and not the elements themselves) can be associated to a class.[13]

Returning to Godard's image, only a flying carpet containing an articulation of ideological elements has a class character, not the elements that have been included in it. This is more the case in social formations where a large amount of the population does not participate directly in dominant production relations – as happens in contemporary capitalism. For the middle-classes, popular interpellations play a much more important role than those embedded within the constitution of their general ideological structure.[14] Because of this, as Ernesto Laclau points out as part of an attempt at defining populism as a political form, popular traditions are privileged instances for the ideological crystallisation of resistance to oppression in general – a resistance that can be 'longer lasting that class ideologies and […] constitute a structural frame of reference of greater stability'.[15] At the same time, popular traditions 'do not constitute consistent and organised discourses but merely elements which can only exist in articulation with class discourses, [which] explains why the most divergent political movements

appeal to the same ideological symbols.' However, this doesn't mean that those traditions are arbitrary and can be modified at will: 'They are the residue of a unique and irreducible historical experience and, as such, constitute a more solid and durable structure of meaning than the social structure itself.'[16]

The role of popular culture elements in *November* and *Lovely Andrea* is similar to that of popular traditions within Laclau's discussion of populism. Pornography, Depeche Mode, Russ Meyer, Spiderman and the Berlin Wall are all ideological elements with an appeal and reach that emancipatory political discourse seems to have lost today. In the face of the fragmentation of life within social and production relations of late capitalism, they can perhaps provide the 'common language' or 'new form of literacy' that Steyerl has claimed as tools to help in the struggle.[17] Through the pivotal role of these popular images and sounds, her films show that it is possible not only to offer a critical image of the world through the moving image (within or without an art context), but also to share strategies and instruments for the struggle.[18] Altogether, this makes Steyerl's films a new model of politicised filmmaking, one for which the term "populist" is a compliment rather than a critique.

This text was originally published in Afterall Journal *no 19, Autumn/Winter 2008. http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.19/populist.cinema.hito.steyerls.november.and.lovely.*

1 See Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789–1820)*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 17.

2 The script was published as "Enquête sur une image,' *Tel Quel*, no. 52, Winter (1972), 74–90, and later in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1985), 350–62.

3 It is perhaps interesting here to recall another film which does something very similar and in a very similar way a few years later. Anthony McCall and Andrew Tyndall's *Argument* (1978) dissects one issue of *The New York Times*, with two male voices – like

those of Gorin and Godard in *Letter to Jane* – alternating in an analysis that goes from the pages of the magazine and its pictures to general questions about film practice, to repeatedly return to where it started. The difference between the two films is perhaps Godard and Gorin's response to their political role as filmmakers, as to a certain extent, Argument seems to conclude by embracing the paralysis Gorin and Godard rejected.

4 This asking of questions seems indebted to the critical method employed by Louis Althusser in his introductory text to the collective volume *Reading Capital* (1968). See Louis Althusser, 'From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy', in Reading Capital, Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1970), also available at http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/RC68NB.html.

5 Ibid., 139.

6 Ibid., 138.

7 This same point is made at the beginning of another film that deals with cinema and the memory of a time of revolution, Chris Marker's *The Last Bolshevik* (1983). The film starts by quoting the following words by George Steiner: 'It is not the literal past that rules us, save, possibly, in a biological sense. It is images of the past.' The historical image of the passage from "October" to "November" is belittled by Steyerl in a short video from 2004 titled, *Mini Europe*, in which a toy caterpillar repeatedly demolishes a maquette of the Wall, right next door to a miniature Brandenburger Tor.

8 Hito Steyerl has written about this particular aspect of this film in "The Articulation of Protest," *republicart.net*, September 2002, accessed July 2008, www.republicart.net/disc/mundial/steyerl02_en.htm. *Art and Social Change. A Critical Reader.*, ed. Will Bradley and Charles Esche (London: Tate, Afterall, 2007), 332-339.

9 As argues Jacques Rancière in *Film Fables* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 168.

10 In Godard and Marker this is not the case. In Godard because until recently he hasn't featured himself in his films (although his voice can be heard in several of them). In Marker, because the way he features himself in his films is… through his love of cats.

11 Edmund Burke, "Review of *Tristram Shandy* (1760)", in Lawrence Sterne, *Tristam Shandy,* ed. Howard Anderson (London: W.W. Norton&Co., 1980), 481.

12 Lenin, "Rough Draft of a Resolution on Proletarian Culture", in *Lenin Collected Works,* Vol. 42 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 217b. Accessed July 28 2008, http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/oct/09b.htm

13 See Étienne Balibar, "The Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser", in *The Althusserian Legacy*, ed. E. Anne Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1993), 12–13.

14 See Ernesto Laclau, "Fascism and Ideology," in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, (London: Verso, 1979), 135.

15 Ibid., 167.

16 Ibid.

17 See Hito Steyerl, " From Ethnicity to Ethics," in *A Fiesta of Tough Choices: Contemporary Art in the Wake of Cultural Practices,* ed. Maria Lind and Tirdad Zolghadr (Oslo: Torpedo Press, 2007), 70.

18 *November*'s coda explains how German urban guerrilla activist in the 1970s learnt their techniques from Tupamaro fighters through Costa Gavras's 1972 film *État de siege*. Although their inability to tell what Gavras had taken from the Uruguayan revolutionaries and what he made up invented himself led to comical failure.




10_3.jpg
12_2.jpg
071.jpg
072.jpg
073.jpg
The style of lighting was similar.

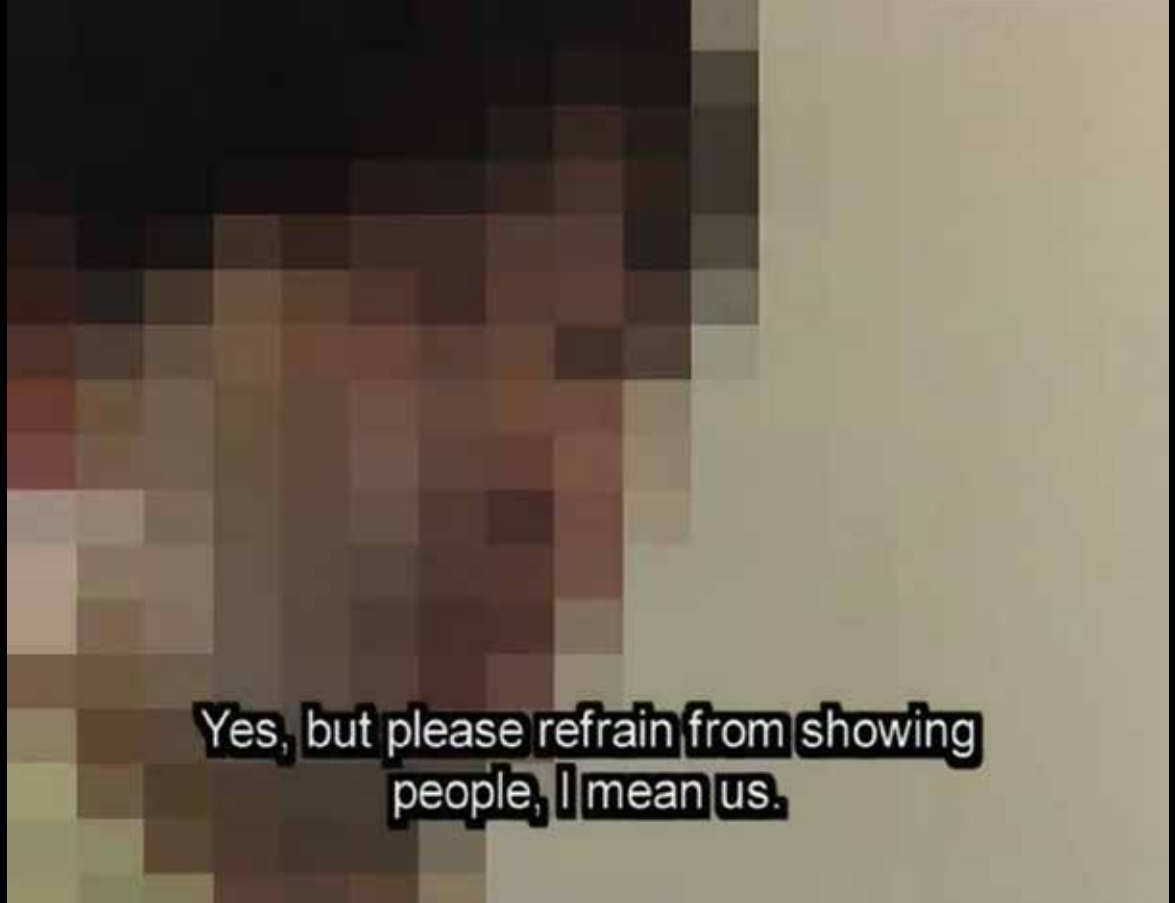


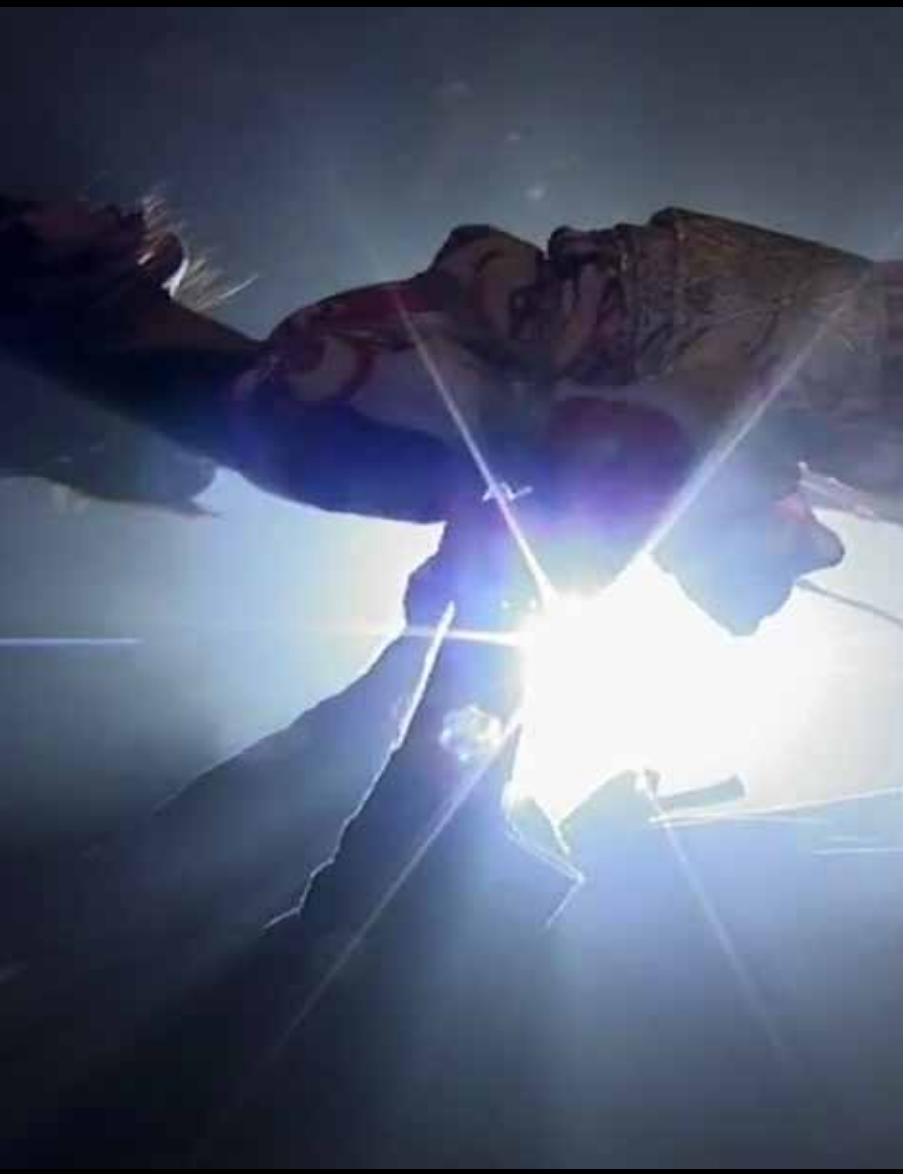
A LA RECHERCHE DU CUL PERDU




Back then there were lots of restrictions.

SPIDER-MAN


Yes, but please refrain from showing
people, I mean us.






RAMONES
But you consider yourself a feminist?

Thomas Elsaesser

Lovely Andrea

Lovely Andrea was the first work by Hito Steyerl I ever encountered. I saw it on the second floor in the atrium of the Fridericianum on July 31, 2007, during documenta 12, curated by Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack. Despite the slightly awkward placing of the video – recessed into what was basically a stairwell – I was immediately hooked: a fitting metaphor, since I "came in" during one of Asagi Ageha's entrancing turns on the rope – suspended, falling, rising, floating. At first I did not quite know why the video held me spellbound, except that its cheerful insouciance did lightened up the rather serious and somewhat solemn atmosphere that seemed to hang over the documenta.

Lovely Andrea is an extraordinary inventive piece, full of sharp wit: the many unexpected but fitting juxtapositions: between Spiderman and web-design; rope tricks and sweatshop garment factories, punk rock from X-Ray Spex and techno-pop from Depeche Mode; modulating into more somber associations with Guantanamo Bay's handcuffed prisoners; Abu Ghraib's notorious 'hooded man with electric wires'; and Japanese soldiers during WWII, tying up their Chinese prisoners before shooting or beheading them.

But there is also dry and deadpan humor, often of the self-deprecating kind, such as the tongue-in-cheek name for this very personal quest: *à la recherche du cul perdu*, or the fluffed takes and retakes that bookend the video. Not coincidentally these are (almost) the only scenes where the filmmaker herself is in the picture, deftly avoiding to give a straight answer to her German producer's question of what the film is finally about.

These meta-cinematic moments alert one to the fact that here is a documentary filmmaker very much aware of the increasingly difficult status of the documentary as genre and practice, especially in the digital age, especially when poised between cinema and television on one side, and art space, museum or gallery on the other.

In the art space of documenta 12 the video ran as a loop, so it really did not have a beginning, middle

and end: another slightly counterproductive effect of showing it as "open plan" rather than in its separate "black box" (which Buergel and Noack explicitly banned from their show). And although commissioned by and for the documenta, *Lovely Andrea* is very carefully constructed in a linear fashion, or so it seems at first viewing. After all, it is a conceived as a quest, a search and a piece of research, which is why many commentators compared it to a "detective story", and even mentioned *Citizen Kane*. Its cinematic ancestors would also be ethnographic films, so that the missing photo of the young Hito as a bondage girl (as opposed to a Bond girl) becomes something like a pretext: to explore the seedy and frankly quite repugnant *nawa-shibari* (captured and suspended) soft-porn industry that services Japanese men's obsession with pubescent girls, some trussed like turkeys, others bound, gagged and wrapped like bundles of used rags ready for scrap or recycling.

As an exercise in erotic ethnography it has its didactic touches. We learn that Japanese bondage developed from the martial arts, when rope was used to capture, torture and transport prisoners of war. An aesthetic exercise as well as a military skill, the rope's associations with eroticism is a 20th phenomenon. We also get a bearded, chain-smoking "expert" leering into the camera, as he explains that 'Japanese SM is submissive, it is based on the feeling of shame', and evidently pleased with his own cleverness, he adds, without being prompted: 'and what is shame? - libido of the brain'. But when an elderly gentleman in a natty suit, by the name of Tanaka Kinichi and deferentially referred to as "the Master" chuckles at the memory of how they used to trick or lure young girls off the streets into his studio, threaten them until they let themselves be bound and photographed, just in exchange for being set free again, the detective story has turned into a horror film, especially since it appears that this was the very man who photographed Hito twenty years earlier, and who

even now proudly shows off his website with hundreds of such photos, insisting that they are "art".

It's more subtle, though, in the video than in my description, but it does give substance to what is the final exchange in the film: 'Do you consider yourself a feminist?' Hito is asked, 'Definitely', she replies, and as a feminist, her politics are both fiercely analytical and radically egalitarian. So, for instance, over shots of girls being prepared for a photographic shoot, she points out that 'bondage is work', followed by 'work is bondage': a nod to Jean Luc Godard's favorite rhetorical trope ('not just an image, but a just image'), illustrated with a video clip of rows of women in a factory, bent over their sewing machines as if they were shackled to them. The video also draws an intriguing parallel between sexual taboos and political taboos, with the Japanese pornographers waxing nostalgic for the good old days of censorship and police raids (when the business was more lucrative but also more edgy), and the teaser for the first *Spider-Man* (2002) film, which was withdrawn (censored) after 9/11 because it showed Spiderman trapping a police helicopter in a giant web spun between the Twin Towers.

But *Lovely Andrea's* politics extends beyond such comparison-equivalences. An important protagonist in the video is the already mentioned Asagi Ageha, a Japanese performance artist, former bondage model and now her own boss, who acts as translator to the crew and as go-between for the filmmaker. Ageha provides an alternative perspective, in fact a dual perspective: as an artist, and as a woman. As an artist, she uses her own body as expressive material, in the tradition of Joan Jonas, Yvonne Rainer, Carolee Schneeman in the 1970s and Marina Abramovic in the 1980s. She calls her work 'self-suspension', explaining what inspires and guides her in her performances, which are indeed extraordinary: 'solo performances that draw on bondage modelling but emphasise acrobatic elements; in an inverted projection, [Ageha] looks as though she is propelled upwards, floating weightless.'[1]

As a woman, Ageha candidly speaks in the film about the pleasures of being bound: 'in the air I'm really free, and on the other hand I am bound with the rope to the center of something', even conceding that 'maybe I cannot live without this feeling anymore'. She echoes a German bondage specialist and rope master who, early on, talked about some of the "victims" liking that floating sensation as well as the sight and the feel of the welts and bruises that the ropes leave on their skin. Another avers that '*nur an Seilen fühle ich mich frei*' (only tied to a rope do I feel free). It is up to us to "suspend" judgment and "balance" the views of these women with what we see of the men who "assist" them, or with the macho swagger of the Tokyo rope masters and porn photographers.

But what about the title *Lovely Andrea*, and the missing photo? At first, it would appear to be the jokey *nom de cul* that Hito gave herself, when she was a film- and art-student in Tokyo, submitting to the titillating photo shoot back in 1987, for which the rope master wanted a taste of the exotic West to go with her bound body. Those who know Hito Steyerl's work, however, know about the emblematic significance of the name Andrea, the central figure of *November* (2004) and a recurring ghost in almost all her work. From November we learn that Andrea Wolf was Hito's best friend when she grew up, whose fiercely independent and combative spirit the young filmmaker used to good effect in her first student film, and who later, under the *nom de guerre* Sehît Rohanî, joined the PKK, the Kurdish Liberation Movement in northern Iraq, where she was killed in 1998. Hito has been doing mourning work for her lost friend ever since, especially since Andrea's body was never recovered, and all that survives is a poster photo, at one time paraded in protest marches where she was held up as a martyr.

A missing body, substituted by a photo in *November*, a missing photo substituting a fetishised (and "tortured") body in *Lovely Andrea*: Godard's trope of the cross-wise exchange would seem to apply here as well, since the relation of body to image goes both

ways, as Andrea's image is also fetishised on the poster, while only God knows what happened to her body. Even though it seems the crew finally track down Hito's photo in one of the hundreds of glossy albums in the "sex archive", one gets the sense that an important ellipsis in *Lovely Andrea* is (the word) "missing", making the video a kind of rebus picture around all that remains an absent presence in both Hito Steyerl's work and her autobiography.

But lest we miss the wider (film) political significance: One of Hito's constant themes in her film work and her writings has been the way that documentary images can be used and abused for political ends and propaganda purposes, and how the circulation of media images can change one's perception of reality in often decisive ways, so that the uncanny power of such images, prized from their context, but trading on their authenticity, is also at issue in *Lovely Andrea*. It makes the quest for the *cul perdu* also the quest for lost "*cul*" (French slang for daring or courage) of the documentary image, which came into filmmaking as a weapon in the struggle for truth and justice, but may now find itself both taken hostage and in bondage – in the art world perhaps no less than in politics.

This text was originally published by Neuer Berliner Kunstverein in December 2013: http://www.thomas-elsaesser.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=91%3Aneuer-berliner-kunstverein&catid=39%3Ablog-category-01&Itemid=70&limitstart=1

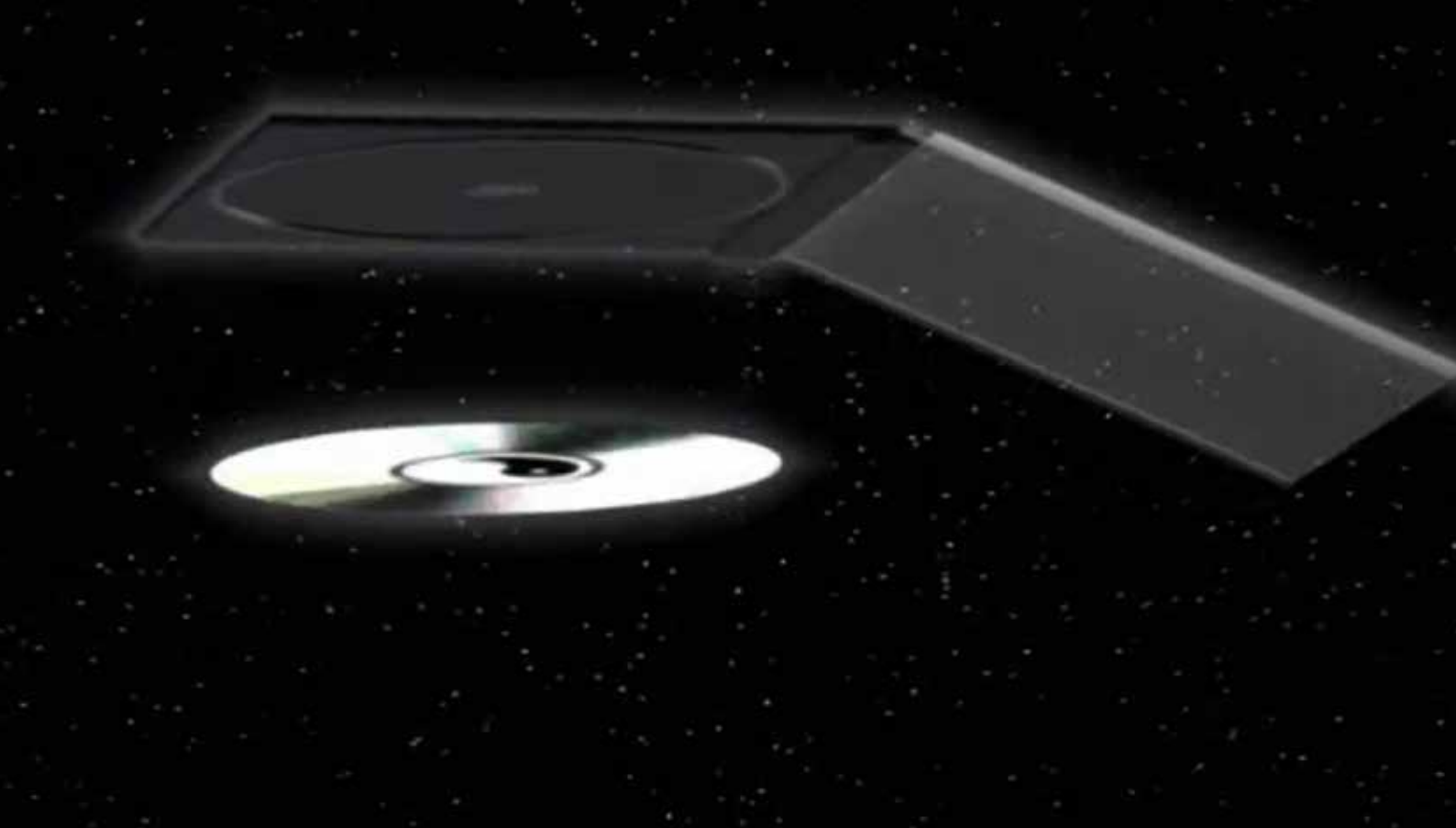
1 Anna Altman, "Hito Steyerl," *Frieze*, 127 (2009), accessed March 2014, http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/hito_steyerl/.

SCOTT



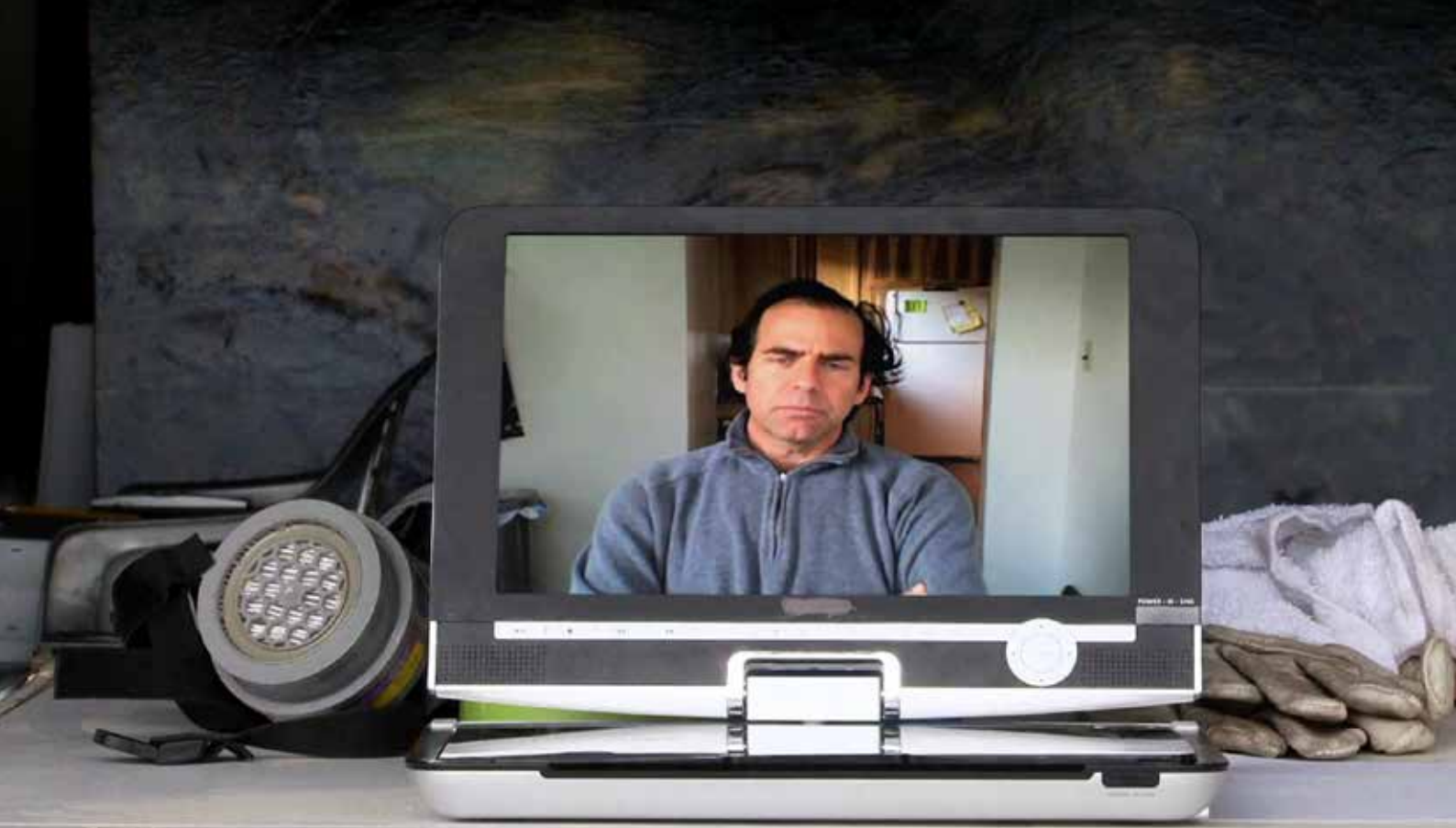







Matter loves on.







Mile High Capitalh

David Riff

“Is this for real?” A Close Reading of *In Free Fall* by Hito Steyerl

The airplane crash. A great readymade game for long flights between workshops and biennials. Something sudden to interrupt the endless easyjet. Forget all those meditations on motionless speed. Forget futurism. Life is more mundane. Really, nothing happens, until something finally does. The stewardess comes with a hot towel that's meant for someone else. Another hour passes. At some point the MacBook Pro battery runs out. Then suddenly there's a lurch and a teeter on the brink. That sinking moment when it becomes clear that everything is lost, a point of no return, in which potential reaches its maximum point and tips into actuality. What comes after that is less important, you don't actually need to see it, though a certain Schadenfreude can't prevent you from registering what you already know: an eerie silence of white light from the window burns your retina and that's it, the aircraft goes off the radar, reels out of control, breaks up and careens to the ground. The smell of kerosene like napalm in the morning. The lurching breakup with flying chunks of engine. Air Force One is down, off the radar. But it's what came before, that sinking moment you should hold on to, it is the moment when knowledge is about to become. It is the moment you continue to rehearse, the moment immediately after the inevitable establishment of a fact and the moment before its ultimate fulfillment. It is the moment upon which Hito Steyerl's *In Free Fall* (2010) hangs suspended.

The last sentence of the preceding paragraph sounds like airplane armchair metaphysics, when actually, it is matter put at stake in Steyerl's film, or to be more precise: the materiality of images, images as things. You can see that in a very literal way in the montage that serves as the film's opening and binds together its three parts as a refrain. Against an apocalyptic sky, a jetliner breaks up in mid-air and people get sucked out the back. The plane smashes into the ground wing first. Chunks of burning engine fall to the palm-lined beach. Survivors emerge from the debris, crying children in their arms. YouTube fragments become blurred geometries in the darkroom

clarity of HD. This is a collective material we all know in the moment before we see it – cut sequences subconsciously memorised, screaming to be reused. "Poor images", blockbuster crashes filtering straight from the obsolescent Fordist dream factory onto the Internet, where they join the other living dead in the peer-to-peer afterlife, recut, cropped, uploaded and juggled in a kind of labour of love by some invisible mass audience of anonymous prosumers, maintained on "public" spaces owned by private corporations, familiar to almost everyone – a no-man's land of phantasms, one of which is the crash, the catastrophe, the end.

We know all about the crash and why this image would be emblematic. The plummet of commodity values on global markets we feel on our skin. The "crash" itself is a spectacular image, the repeatable suddenness of which hides the reality it claims to represent, if one thinks about the delayed effects of ongoing economic crisis; continual governance by state of exception; repeated shock therapy and privatisation; and overt class war from above – a slow war of position, waged through small electroshocks and doses of disinformation everyday. Crisis is never sudden, it simmers forever and boils over one day. In real time, a certain systemic logic, an economy of poverty emerges: the crisis generates its own ways of visualising itself, its ways of coping, its own affects, its own resources, its own modes of recycling the ruins.

It is to such a site of recycling that Hito Steyerl takes us. With pristine HD steadicam footage, she visits Mojave Air and Space Center – a scrap-yard under a piercingly blue California sky where airplanes come to die. A jolly captain with a pearl-studded cap and a wheelchair cart becomes the entrepreneurial Virgil, the informant who leads us through their afterlife. He tells us about his business ever since the Chinese started buying scrap. 'Every time there's a dip in the economy, it's windfall to us', he says, surrounded by profitable ghosts. The montage of the footage breaks the interviewee's own narrative into discrete, even disjointed units – conscious

cracks and jumps in speech. These units reinforce the double identification of the airplane graveyard as a site of economic catastrophe then transformed into a Hollywood soundstage: the graveyard's owner first uses the gutted airplane carcasses for special effects explosions ('… boom, away she goes', he says, as we see the ball of flame on a perfect day, a Hollywood image that repeats again and again). And then he sells the remains, the raw aluminium. The 'vicious situation of the economy' is a profitable explosion. He understands, he knows: 'you're making money no matter what you sell'. To reinforce the constructive edit, Steyerl transforms this new knowledge (namely that there is a profitable life after the crash) into a thing: we see the explosion on a small DVD-player, playing against the backdrop of airplane wreckage. It is an image that will haunt the whole film, its frontispiece.

This is where Steyerl's film takes off and dances. Michael Jackson syncopates a re-cut Discovery Channel documercial on aluminum recycling that now plays on the DVD player we saw before. The thing about aluminum is that 'it's so recyclable', suggests the loop. It can be used again and again, like the "poor images" of the crash itself, one might add. The DVD player shows us how airplane scrap travels down the assembly line; to be melted down back into molecules; becoming the extremely durable coating on DVDs; again and again, overlaid by other samples from the captain's interview, forever. The airplane is transubstantiated, turned into a medium for the picture of its own explosive dissolution. The symbol of Fordism at its cruising altitude (the jetliner) takes wings into its own afterlife as a DVD, becoming a temporary symbol of post-Fordist crisis as commodity. Another early CGI image that will haunt the film: the simple ellipse of the DVD travelling around the globe as an orbital vehicle – more like a flying saucer than the Learjet-like lobe of Spaceship One: the suborbital private spacecraft that took off from another part of the Mojave Air and Space Port in 2004, around the same time 'the Chinese started buying scrap', by the way.

This, of course, is the refrain to which Steyerl's film must return, as its passengers embark to the sounds of the 5th Dimension's *Up, Up and Away*. The pilot introduces the air safety video. You know you are in for some bad eternity when the guy from *Lost* looks out of the window. The lurch that stood at the film's beginning repeats, leading into the same old, good-old, any-old crash sequence. Another reproduction, another turn, another crash: Air Force One is down again, another shock effect to extend the general trauma that facilitates the kinds of drastic economic redefinitions that crises always bring. How much can we know about this endless repetition? Can we stop ourselves from falling? Falling for what? Is this just another repetition, another rehearsal?

+++

When the second crash sequence is over, the camera returns to the Mojave aircraft bone-yard, but without the suggestive electronic shofars. It is clear: this is documentary, factography, even, with all the attendant desires.[1] Our hope, of course, is that an operative practice like factography would somehow lead to the reality beyond the spectacle, if not to a new dialectical realism: a living art true to its time, a political art that will grasp the problems of its day, not by interpreting but by changing them.

For now, Steyerl satisfies at least some of those demands. The tone becomes desert-dry didactic, gravel and sand crunching underfoot. Steyerl's narrating voice (in German, with English subtitles) is almost flat, as she introduces Sergei Tretyakov's famous 1929 essay, "The Biography of the Object". This is a new mode of narration in which the story of an object tells of the people who made it, and gives a cross-section of the social relations through which it was formed. Crunch goes the wrecker, through wires and fuselage, underscoring the fact that we are talking about materialism, and not just some fancy metaphors. On the dinky little DVD player close to the

wreckage, an inter-title announces '*Biography of an Object: 4X-JYI*'. 4X-JYI was a Boeing 707-700 blown up for the movie *Speed* (1994) – you can read its number on the tail-fin in the footage. Before that, a young expert tells us in Hebrew, the craft served in the Israeli Air Force. The jolly captain confirms the explosion: holes in the wings and kerosene on a crystal desert day. Imagine the glory. Ka-boom.

The explosion from *Speed* becomes an implosion as Steyerl goes back to the biography's beginnings, to the crucial year 1929: the year the stock market crashed, the year with the most airplane crashes in history, the year Tretyakov wrote his essay, one of many crucial documents in the Soviet Cultural Revolution. Deadpan slapstick footage of early aviation crashes links 1929 to Howard Hughes and the film *Hell's Angels*, whose story we know from Scorsese's *Aviator* (2004). The jolly captain ominously tells us that he also knew Hughes. Intercut with a TWA promo video from the 1950s or '60s. 4X-JYI was ordered by Hughes Tool Company in 1956, and served as a part of TWA's fleet until the 1970s, when it was sold to Israel for military use. The DVD player plays parts of an Israeli reportage on the Re'em Squadron, a refueling unit made up of former commercial airliners. 4X-JYI served in this squadron, the expert tells us. But its cousin – a plane from the same batch of 707s – 4X-JYD is also a movie star. Converted into an electronic command centre, it was part of the operation at Entebbe in 1976, in which Israeli and Ugandan military rescued hostages from an airliner taken over by German and Palestinian militants from the PFLP. Three movies were made. The tension builds. On the dinky DVD player, terrorists pull the pin of a hand grenade and bust into the cockpit. They announce their movement's complicated name (Che Guevara Front, Gaza Brigade, another set of reproductions) and that the airplane is in their hands. Klaus Kinski's appearance makes it clear: the affect of film (and not just THIS film) has once again taken us over completely. We're now under control. By and for what and whom, remains unclear.

+++

Sergei Tretyakov's "The Biography of the Object,"[2] was actually rooted in a critique of the novel as such: the novel is always a psychological machine that favours subjectification and affect over objects and objectivity. 'In the novel, the leading hero devours and subjectivises all reality', writes Tretyakov; its structure of psychological consumption – internalisation, one could say – and feudal history locate the genre in a world of leisure time, shunning the world of production. The biography of the object is the alternative. As the object – any produced object – travels down the assembly line, it is defined by the people on both sides of the belt – people who are not heroes or villains, as Tretyakov remarks, but producers and reproducers of certain relations that the things themselves and the traces on their surfaces later express. Writing a literature of facts and biographies of things would involve understanding precisely what social relations go into a thing's production. This would be done in the hope of not only interpreting the production process, but actually changing and controlling it socially. That is, Tretyakov's project is one of creating a heightened awareness, and even more, a kind of solidarity with the world of things.

This is not so much an aesthetic alternative to the Bildungsroman that describes the 'suffering of proletarian Werthers in their leisure hours', as a pedagogical one. Brecht called Tretyakov his teacher, and really, pedagogy was central to Tretyakov's life project – be it teaching Russian in China, or setting up kolkhoz newspapers in the Crimean. He also regularly published his travelogues and texts in magazines for Komsomol activists and young pioneers.[3]

Young pioneers play a central role in another monument of early factography: the famous sequence by Dziga Vertov from the Kinoki's report on how pioneers try to convince a NEP market of the benefits of collective enterprise, the sequence where a cow gets cut up in reverse. This, in its science-film-aesthetic, together with the

film as a whole, illustrates the desires behind Tretyakov's idea of the 'biography of the object' – its didactics, and Soviet Fordism at large (namely, that common knowledge of production processes can ultimately create a society in which work is effortless). The cow can be "assembled" and brought back to life. This is a literal reversal much like the one that must have gone through the head of Henry Ford when he invented his assembly line with a glance at the "disassembly lines" of the slaughterhouses in Cincinnati. But the reassembly of the disassembled cow is not just an argument for the more rational beef production, an advertising clip for a certain "object" (in this case Soviet beef, the Soviet camera eye, and the Soviet project on the whole). Instead, through Vertov's camera eye, we see a promise: together we will gain control of production, reproduction, and time; together, we will soar, like the 'Flying Proletarians' of Mayakovsky's strangely romantic epic poem written in service of aviation (the Soviet Fordist equivalent to *Hell's Angels*).[4] We will live in aerial cities like those of late 1920s paper architect Georgy Krutikov, and when we look down we will see Suprematism spread out in all its autarchy. Together we will learn how to harness implosions.

+++

Steyerl's film shows you such an implosion, when the fireball from *Speed* sucks back in to recreate 4X-JYI. But what does the biography of the object mean today? The manmade aerial geometries that Gastev, Malevich, and Tretyakov so admired now provide the opening visuals for the romantic comedy *Up in the Air* (2010). Whatever confirmation we seek we will find virtualised and dissolved online, stored on physical servers under circular fields hidden in defunct EMP-shielded missile silos. Moving images are no longer commodities once they are uploaded. Botoxed with new codecs to hide the pixelations, they begin to resemble inversions of Duchamp's reciprocal readymades – comrade things

that can be rewound and replayed over and over again as ringtone fetishes, performed at random by whatever multifunctional gadget you happen to be attached to. The purpose or the lack thereof depends entirely on you. So at least the promise.

Such conditions would seem appropriate enough for a new 'biography of the object', put to use as a critical instrument for revealing the conditions that underlie the spectacle. However, *In Free Fall* misplaces these hopes, or, more precisely, it reappropriates them. The ticking tension becomes increasingly phantasmagoric; the 'biography of the object' has started to speak of something else entirely. Stranger than fiction, the narrative entangles itself in the garbled versions of the totality that we all carry around in our heads – presenting an increasingly paranoid, even catastrophic sequence of affective doublings that rest upon something too fluid to be called pure reproducibility. Che Guevara Front, Gaza Brigade. This is not just about the spectacularisation and failure of politics, the conversion of its "grand narrative" into piecemeal for the evening news. Instead, perhaps predictably, it is exchangeability that takes over the narrative. The film becomes more realistic than realism; it is as if the commodities themselves could speak, as in that famous opening of Marx's *Capital* volume. 1.[5]

Paradoxically, it is this moment of exchangeability of images that reveals the object's biography to be a story made by people, whose affective labour still feeds the exchangeable commodity form, despite all claims that 'there is no outside'. The Israeli expert looks past the camera and asks, in English, 'Is it HD?' He then smiles and regains his composure when he hears that it is. The hijackers announce that we have almost reached our destination, and that we are in the hands of an international revolutionary movement. The wrecker at Mojave tears into more fuselage. Charles Bronson is back on the DVD player, together with Robert Loggia. After some more ticking tension music, the story reaches its deathward climb in a gunfight. Four dead hostages, on top of 45 Ugandan soldiers, the hijackers and of course

Yoni Netanyahu. But other than that, a 'sweeping success,' says the expert-actor, who then adds, 'so cheesy', before translating the whole thing into English much to the mirth of the entire team off-screen. 4X-JYD briefly served as Israel's Air Force One, and is now a movie theatre in the Air Force Museum of Hatzarim. Another affective-mimetic simulator ride; the expert's work becomes overt mimetic labour. Once again, we suspend our disbelief.

The story returns to 4X-JYI, which became a transport plane in the Israeli Air Force's 120th International Squadron, the support-and-refueling group that has been training for attacks on long-range targets. Again, Klaus Kinski comes on screen. A stewardess offers him champagne. He assures her and us that he has his own brand. As champagne pours into flatbed glasses, celebrating year one of the 707, he extracts a grenade from the bottle. 'In interviews with Israeli Air Force, the word Iran is never mentioned. But it floats in the air'. Like bombs. The expert-actor shows us a close up of the tiny 707 matchbox model, 4X-JYI stenciled in on the wing. The bus from *Speed* slams into the plane again, the music comes on and we don't know what exactly is exploding: is this some future apocalypse involving Israel and Iran? Is this still all about 4X-JYI? Or maybe it is Tretyakov's 'biography of the thing' that has been blown to bits?

To support that last reading, Steyerl herself steps in before the recycling sequence, wearing what could be Rodchenko's black *haute couture* proletarian jumpsuit. She is overshadowed by yet another machine: the wrecking claw, a negative halo, about to squash her head. 'In 1929, Tretyakov asserts that the life of individuals is less important than the life of objects', she reads from a sheet of paper. 'Matter loves, er, lives on in different forms'. The Freudian slip breaks what would otherwise be a dour anti-humanism. It is a conscious reply to Tretyakov's ascetic assertion that, 'people's individual and distinctive characteristics are no longer relevant' in the biography of the thing. 'The tics and epilepsies of the individual go unperceived'. Here, the entire edit hangs on such a tic.

The pixelated aluminum bars look like gold or silver as they are shoved into the furnace. The artist herself becomes material in the cut, a speaking object, like Michael Jackson, who is back, he/it/we are all so recycleable like aluminium. The slip repeats again as melted aluminum pours, until Steyerl completes the phrase, 'Matter lives on in different forms, this does not apply to humans'.

To preempt any unnecessary pathos, the safety film starts with its yellow oxygen masks, and the expert is back, wearing a uniform and pilot's cap, chromakeyed against a wrecked airplane interior. The inflight words of welcome are done with a much thicker accent than before. 'It's too much, no', he laughs, as a mother reassuringly helps her little girl to put on the oxygen mask. We know we are in for trouble again when the guy from *Lost* looks out of the window, and the plane tilts another time. Now more than ever, we don't need to see the explosion. We have learned its biography by heart. But even more, we have become part of the carnage. All we need is the title of the emblem, its nominal presence, its logos, its sound.

+++

Gravel crunches underfoot. The sun is bright. The silence holds. The steadicam pans over girders, wires, scraps of fuselage. 'Good morning, Kevan', says Steyerl off-screen, asking who shot these images. We are now seeing them for the third time around. 'I photographed them', he confesses from Skype. What follows at first looks a little like a "making of" as it is usually told in special features on commercial DVDs. From Skype – Kevan tells us that he was trying to extricate himself from a financial situation. He talks about the little house he bought and turned into an architectural masterpiece. Oddly enough, he remarks, it was clad in aluminium like an airplane. But the crisis forced him to sell it when the real estate market was at an all-time low. Part of a landing gear stands alone on the edge of the Mojave runway, a little like the ghost towns of Arizona and California. The claw crunches into

fuselage again. 'We had to prepare for a crash. Once the process of descent began, there wasn't anything to stop it'.

Kevan confirms that allegories have a certain use-value when he talks about how watching and editing the film helped him understand that he needed to ride it out and put something back together on the other side. The introductory sequence of radar disappearances and rapid descent are back as an illustration, so overloaded with significance now that there is a waning of affect. We know this all by heart. We have become numb to terror itself. We are living through the consequences.

To mark this transition, the dinky DVD player migrates to a new location. There is a large oil painting in the background up on a huge easel, a smaller one dangles suspended from the ceiling, which almost looks like a bondage quote from Steyerl's earlier film *Lovely Andrea* (2007). Comrade thing is a bondage model recast as an oil painting, an exemplar for which theorists like Boris Arvatov and Sergei Tretyakov exhibited an almost pathological (and one could say misogynistic) hatred. The moving image, threatened by crisis and made obsolete through cooptation by the Internet's 'communism of capital', returns to painting. Abstract Expressionism 2.0.

This is strangely appropriate, if you think about the genealogy of post-war painting, which already made its home in the equivalent of the airplane graveyard, a jumble of mimetic devices and strokes. For abstract expressionism, canvas and paint had become base matter, to be recycled, a little like aluminium; the formlessness of gravity had replaced the gravitas of form. The ultimate claim is that painting after the collapse of painting could be more indexical than photography. The moment of contact was key, its ultimate goal to create comrade things that are more like lovers than friends, like the canvases of Mark Rothko, which are supposed to quicken in proximity effects like silky skin, if you don't get distracted by the security guards. There is no truth beyond that; abstract expressionism does not need any veracity devices, save that of the romantic authorial biography, which now

finds ways to connect and internalise truth as base matter, to intern it in a personal form whose process or "happening" is far more important than any material result. Kevan returns to painting after the crash of painting, a site all the more specific because it is linked to a very definite cultural tradition deployed as a knowledge weapon in the Cold War.

We see Kevan at work in his studio, presumably located in a space provided by a former part of the military-industrial complex. He talks about how he worked as a video engineer who would put moving images on TV-screens or other devices into films in any circumstance. We see him projecting the explosion of 4X-JYI from a notebook to canvas, juggling the pictures in real time. 'There was a great need for veracity in film, and one of the best ways to do it would be to put a television in what you're doing', he tells us from the DVD player, which itself has served as such a veracity device. 'It makes things seem real'.

Painting used to be full of such devices, so in that sense too, Kevan's practice is a painting after painting, a world of homeless representations. That turn in painting was only possible because its veracity devices turned out to be little more than scenery, props and projection surfaces, even if they once had the validity of law.[6]

Steyerl involuntarily returns us to such a long history of mobile images by showing us Kevan as he sketches the flying saucer of the DVD on a canvas in pencil. Images circulate, he tells us, and precisely that is the problem. People no longer watch television, or at least not like they used to. The time that used to stream back to the corporations as money now streams back down to the user as a torrent. The "user's freedom" to watch TV without commercial breaks online produces the strange new freedom for Kevan to manipulate his canvases like familiar comrade things, in destigmatised degraded surfaces that will never reach any museum: the ubiquity of images means that he is out of a job, destined to produce the kind of painting that by no stretch of the imagination is a

valuable art market commodity. 'The corporations have to squeeze somebody so then they squeeze labour, the means of production', says Kevan. The emblematic image of the DVD, applied in oil paint and burnt by a blowtorch, looks like it has been through a crash itself, remarks Steyerl. Indeed, it was 'caught in the digital revolution'. Painting this emblem of obsolescence becomes the only possible therapy after that 'experience of descent'. It is the only way of dealing with that feeling of flying a plane that you can't land.

Suddenly, the Skype confessional breaks off. The jolly captain is back to tell us another story, only now this story is true. 'We're heading down through 20,000 feet in our approach', he says, when air traffic control calls him and tells him that there's a bomb on board. Because stuff like this really happens. The footage on the DVD player is back again briefly with its ticking bomb. Only now, the Hollywood soundtrack illustrates a real-life experience, finally giving credence to phrases that we have been hearing all along, torn out of context and used as material for biographies of things. Is this for real? This is like a simulator ride. Here, the footage itself is related back to a real close encounter on the part of the film's most fictitious and uncanny character, who suddenly turns out to be a subject too, and not just some Howard Hughes type Fat Controller. Precarity is ubiquitous. Danger is everywhere.

Following the logic of equivalencies, the crash footage becomes a document of his experience, too, much like painting could be understood as more of a document or a prompt for some universal aesthetic experience than an aesthetic experience in and of itself. Again we are about to suspend our disbelief. 'Whoa', remarks the Israeli expert qua captain, and what happens to the passengers? The spectators? The audience? 'Breathe normally', says the safety video, as the aircraft breaks apart in half. And does anybody make it out alive? A skydiver plummets from the explosion. Wind whistles as he tries to catch a falling parachute. Oxygen masks drop into the abandoned cockpit. The film goes back to that point of undecidability

where fiction and reality merge, where knowledge hangs suspended, where there is so much air that you cannot breathe.

It is at this point that Steyerl's film generates what is perhaps its most memorable and its most painterly image. The Israeli expert and Steyerl are in uniform and unison, rehearsing the mechanical ballet of the airline safety routine against the backdrop of windmills turning desert wind into energy. The safety routine is an individualised mass ornament, biomechanical in the sense of avant-garde theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold, who instructed his actors in Taylorist moves gleaned directly from Alexei Gastev's rationalisation manuals: a performance of post-human robotics, an internalisation of the Futurist costumes in *Victory over the Sun*. The windmills indicate the possibility for a new stage of post-Fordist rationalisation involving "smart energy" knowledge production and other new sources of income for a nicer, "softer" capitalism with a post-human face, where people-qua-commodities continually "maintain" and "reproduce" their routines in loose and grandiose biomechanical performances. This is mimetic labour: building potentialities that can never quite be actualised, sometimes approaching virtuosic grace, sometimes on the verge of comic disintegration into total dilettantism. Virgin winds upturned; productive leisure performed by imperfect bodies re-forged in late afternoon sunlight.

There is some uncanny proximity to painting from the height of the Stalinist purges in these images. It makes sense. Meyerhold was shot as a Japanese spy. Sergei Tretyakov jumped to his death down a flight of stairs while in the clutches of the NKVD. Boris Arvatov ended his days in the madhouse. Socialist realism is factography's afterlife, a precursor of peer-to-peer. What we see in these sun-drenched images is a little like the work of former October-group member Alexander Deineka. A similar source of oxygen lies buried somewhere in his painting of three little boys on a shoreline watching a seaplane fly away. It is air from a postcard. Air you try to breathe when you crane

your neck to look at Deineka's famous ceiling mosaics in the Moscow metro station Mayakovskaya. Under what was supposed to be Meyerhold's theatre, upward views of Soviet aviation at all times of day, suggesting sky more than 30 metres underground. Such oxygen is the air of disposable time, time that can be stolen in a noisy crowd, on an assembly line escalator, in a pause during a lecture, under almost any regime. It is the air of total inoperativity at the height of production, fatally locked into the black box of the High Definition video cube. From outside that box, all one can hear is the sound of its own making – that oxygen hymn with which Hito Steyerl's film *In Free Fall* reaches its end.

This text was originally published on eipcp.net, November, 2011. http://eipcp.net/transversal/0311/riff/en.

1 A catalogue of such desires can be found in the *eipcp* issue of *Transversal*, 09/10, "The New Productivisms", with contributions by Christina Kiaer, Devin Fore, Hito Steyerl, Dmitry Vilensky, Gerald Raunig, Marco Peljhan, edited by Marcelo Exposito. This publication – and the concurrent issue of Chto Delat? "What is the use of art?" – are documents of a renewed interest in the "factography" that an English reading audience has known since 1984 through Benjamin H. D. Buchloh's "From Faktura to Factography," *October* 30 (Autumn 1984), 82–119. Also see *transversal* 09 (2010), http://eipcp.net/transversal/0910.

2 Sergei Tretyakov, "The Biography of the Object," *October* 118 (Fall 2006), 57–62.

3 It was for pioneers that Tretyakov designed one of his most intriguing experiments, documented in a text called "The Pocket". The experiment was started in 1929 when he asked his young readers to empty their pockets (and rather eerily, thinking of Pavlik Morozov, those of their neighbour) to describe the history of each of the objects inside, to invent or construct such biographies. The experiment continued until shortly after the end of the Cultural Revolution, in 1933, when Tretyakov, about to embark on a militant investigation of collectivisation, published its results. Today, every one gets to play Tretyakov's game in those split seconds at the airport security check.

4 V.V. Mayakovsky, *The Flying Proletarian* (1925).

5 Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume 1. (1887): 'Could commodities themselves speak, they would say: Our use value may be a thing that interests men. It is no part of us as objects. What, however, does belong to us as objects, is our value. Our natural intercourse as commodities proves it. In the eyes of each other we are nothing but exchange values'.

6 Think of Jan van Eyck's The *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434), where the mirror is a seal on a visual marriage contract as well as a symbol for mimesis and its capacity to reflect reality, which supplies the author with his juridical authority. It comes as no surprise that later scholarship shows this contract itself to be a fake.


Do you remember whether
the auditorium used to be
painted grey?


IN 2012 TWO
CONSERVATORS
ARE TRYING TO
UNCOVER
ADORNO´S GREY.


We can still have a look if there
is something under the plaster.



uf Adorno (1969):


KAPITA


I would try to scrape it as
raggedly as possible



They just hit the book and pushed a bit; but it worked, it protected people behind the line.



Break back in where you just broke out?

Ana Teixeira Pinto

Theory and the Young Girl

On April 22nd, 1969, Theodor W. Adorno's lecture "Introduction to Dialectical Thought", was disrupted by a group of students. Whilst heckling could be heard coming from the last rows of the auditorium, someone scribbled a rhyme on the blackboard: *'Wer nur den lieben Adorno läßt walten, der wird den Kapitalismus sein Leben lang bewalten'* (The ones who let dear Adorno rule will preserve capitalism for the rest of their lives). In the midst of the ensuing confusion, three female students surrounded the professor, tossed him tulips and roses and danced bare-breasted around his desk. Adorno hastily gathered his papers and stormed out of the room. The puzzled majority of students took a while to realise that the lecture would not take place. Adorno did not resume his teaching. Not that day, nor ever. On August 6th, that same year, the 65-year-old philosopher succumbed to a heart attack while hiking in Switzerland.[1]

The events of that April 22nd were the result of mounting tension between students and faculty at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt. In May 1964, Adorno instituted legal proceedings against members of the Situationist-inspired group, Subversive Aktion, for quoting him in a series of posters with mocking 'Wanted' headlines. On January 31st, 1969, the student movement stormed the Institute of Social Research after a failed attempt to occupy the Sociology Department. Adorno and Friedeburg called the police to evacuate the building and 76 students were arrested. They were all released later that evening except for student leader, Hans-Jürgen Krahl, one of Adorno's doctoral students who derided the faculty as *"Scheißkritische Theoretiker"* (shitty critical theoreticians),[2] while being led away by police officers. Adorno was later to testify against Krahl, though he kept his testimony strictly factual. He did however, make plain his aversion to the student's struggle in his correspondence with Herbert Marcuse: 'I am the last person to underestimate the merits of the student movement; it has disrupted the

smooth transition to the totally administered world. But it contains a grain of insanity in which a future totalitarianism is implicit'.[3]

Hito Steyerl's 2012 film *Adorno's Grey* takes the events of that April as its starting point, juxtaposing the student's protests to yet another quasi-forgotten anecdote: a perhaps apocryphal story, which states that Adorno had the auditorium where he taught painted grey to aid concentration. Assuming a forensic perspective the artist leads a team of conservators who scrap away paint and plaster in the quest for the mythical colour, whilst a series of voice-over interviews attempts to reconstitute the chain of causation which links the topless protesters to Adorno's heart failure. The film is shot in black and white but the absence of saturation or contrast results in an overwhelming grey hue, within which – as interviewee Peter Osborne puts it – the opposition between philosophy and life is coded as an opposition between greyness and colour. The reference for Adorno's grey – Osborne speculates – might be found in Hegel's preface to his "Elements of the Philosophy of Right" (orig. 1821), where he wrote that, 'when philosophy paints its grey in grey, one form of life has become old, and by means of grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known'.[4]

But Adorno was no Hegelian. Against Hegel's notion that, 'what is rational is real; and what is real is rational'[5], Adorno spoke of sufferance as a fact of unreason. The unity between thought and being can only be achieved negatively, by suppressing difference and obviating the particular. Treating philosophy and social sciences as both revealing and distorting underlying social relations, Adorno describes the non-identity between theory and practice, as a dialectic entailing 'the consistent consciousness of non-identity',[6] the central category of which is contradiction. For Adorno, the whole is the untrue and hegelian synthesis is but the imposition of the principle of equivalence (in Marxist terms, of exchange value) upon that

which is fundamentally non-equivalent (use-value). The belligerent breasts – to refer to Nina Power's spirited formulation – of the female students cannot be conformed to their social connotations without betraying their agency as autonomous body parts. Autonomous body parts however, also entail a cultural baggage of their own – as partial objects or living currency, they sever the eye from the hand reproducing the scopophilic logic of advertisment, which commands to look but prevents to touch. Much like aesthetic form proves hard to reconcile with social function, they prove hard to reconcile with the bodies they belong to, representing, we could perhaps say, 'the torn halves of an integral freedom to which, however, they do not add up.'[7]

Upon realising the grey coat is nowhere to be found, Steyerl instructs the conservators to scratch the white surface in order to create a fuzzy, greyish, effect, somewhat similar to an abstract expressionist painting. In a reciprocating yet distorting rapport, the camera becomes a black square, the white wall becomes a canvas, a grey block transverses the screen. Weighed against the tradition of primary structures and geometric abstraction that constituted the formal lexicon of modern art up until Minimalism, painting and film cross and then break with each other. Whilst the several narrative threads overhaul one another, the fragmented planes making up the multi-layered narrative sequence are also screened against the overlapping plates of a disjointed structure (produced by the architects of Studio Miessen, Berlin). There is no resolution in *Adorno's Grey*, neither as film nor as form.

Adorno had initially supported the student protests, but he never believed in the identity of consciousness and social being. Whereas the Marxist tradition spoke of volition, and of a society predicated on production; the New Left spoke of desire and (perhaps unwittingly) implied a society built on a principle of consumption, within which, images –even the revolutionary image– were to became the ultimate

commodity, furthering market hegemony over the social. The image of throbbing flesh pitched against aged grey theory is one such commodity, but the relation between theory and praxis cannot be solved by an image, nor – as the artist puts it – can it be displaced onto a verdict of guilty/not guilty. In our own precarious present, all of these dichotomies seem quaint. But it remains nonetheless ironic that young women have attained the professor's pulpit just when philosophy departments are being axed everywhere. On May 20th, 2010, the faculty supported the students who occupied Trent Park library at the ill-fated Middlesex Philosophy Department, to protest its impending closure. Applying the principles of corporate efficiency to higher education – as Nina Power and Peter Osborne have made manifest – will revert philosophy to a turf of the privileged 'discussing the finer points of formal logic over sherry'.[8] Either way, the passions surrounding the events of '68-69, as well as the student movement's disappointment with the Marxist response, were to create an insurmountable riff within the Left that remain in the present day. In *Adorno's Grey* this riff surfaces as a shattered narrative, conflating wall paint with critical theory and the camera shutter with the autonomy of hermetic forms – a story composed of breasts and books and bits and pieces – each of which points to a partial truth; each of which expresses the identity and non-identity of the parts to the whole.

1 See Esther Leslie, "Introduction to Adorno/Marcuse Correspondence on the German Student Movement", *New Left Review* I/233 (January–February 1999).

2 "SOZIOLOGEN FRANKFURTER SCHULE – China am Rhein," *Der Spiegel*, March 17, 1969, accessed March 2014, http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-45763482.html.

3 Leslie, "Introduction to Adorno/Marcuse Correspondence on the German Student Movement".

4 G.W.F. Hegel, Preface to *"Elements of the Philosophy of Right"*, orig. 1820 (Batoche Books, 2001, 20.

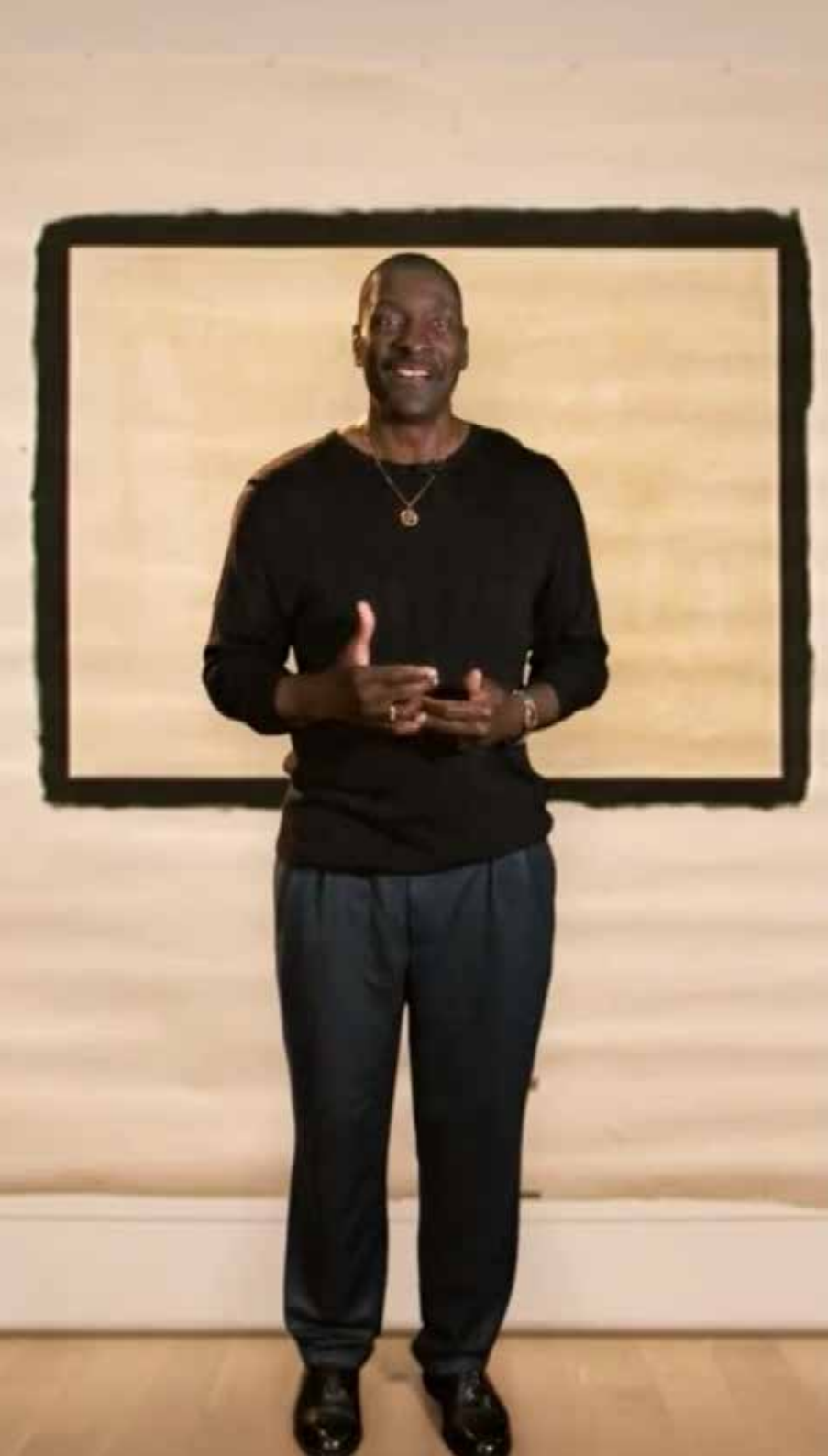
5 Ibid., 18.

6 Theodor W. Adorno "Negative Dialectics", orig. 1966, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), 5.

7 Correspondence with Benjamin, March 18, 1936, quote from *New Left Review* XI (1973), 166.

8 Nina Power, "A Blow to Philosophy and to Minorities", *The Guardian*, Thursday 29 April, 2010, accessed March 2014 http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/apr/29/philosophy-minorities-middleqsex-university-logic.





















This is a shot.





This is a countershot.



Then 10-15 Cobra Helicopters came and started shooting and shooting and shooting.

This is a countershot.



This is an ammunition container.





Nick Aikens

Bullets from the Black Box: Hito Steyerl's *Is the Museum a Battlefield?* and *Guards*

In a recent essay, artist Walid Raad recounts a fictional conservation with Mordechai Shniberg or "Moti" as he is known, founder of the Artist Pension Trust (APT), in his airy office in a Manhattan loft. Raad, when inquiring about what he saw as the worrying links between APT (a scheme involving artists donating works that are subsequently sold with proceeds split between contributors) and sections of the Israeli Defence Force, was met with the following response: 'Please don't tell me that you are one of those naive left-wing, head-in-the-sand pontificators who actually think that the cultural, technological, financial and military sectors are not, and have not always been, intimately linked?'[1] Moti's words are disarming, fictional or not. He steadfastly, smugly even, confirms Raad's concerns about the sources of money and political affiliations that drive APT. Shniberg not-so-subtly implies that the only idiots unaware of their involvement in the conceptual, digital, speculative and violent web that is the contemporary art world are 'left wing pontificators' – many of whom are credited with producing the objects, theories and performances that fill art spaces throughout the world.

Moti is of course right. Cases of the inter-connectedness between art, the darker sides of finance and shady political or military interests are not hard to find (with the resignation of the chairman of the Sydney biennial a recent case in point).[2] The position of the group of artists who boycotted the exhibition to make light of – and refuse to play a part in – the biennial's reliance on money made on the back of the Australian government's heavily dubious immigration policy is a rare example of the cloak of money and politics that covers contemporary art being lifted. Indeed the largely invisible, ignored or un-discussed underbelly of art is often left to its own devices (with the mutual consent of those involved) until someone upsets the tide and the only response is boycotts or protests.

Tracking and exposing the flow of the murky interests that fuels global contemporary art is one thing.

But what would happen if the trajectory that begins with corrupt private money or bloodied hands and ends up in international exhibitions and galleries could be reversed? This is one question Hito Steyerl poses in her lecture *Is the Museum a Battlefield?*, first delivered at the Istanbul Biennial in September 2013 (the political traction of this exhibition largely slipped away in the wake of its retreat from public space following the Gezi Park protests) and which has recently been re-cut into a 40 minute film. Steyerl's lecture is a speculative wander that aims to trace the bullets fired both from and at the museum. What makes *Is the Museum a Battlefield?* more than a well-choreographed exposé of the sources of art patrons' wealth, is its move beyond the politics of funders (important as they are) to examine the similarity in weapons (digital, economic and conceptual) that all parties standing in the battlefield of contemporary culture deploy. Luckily for us, Steyerl is a mean shot.

The lecture departs with the history of the museum as a site of warfare, showing footage of the Bolsheviks storming the Winter Palace – later the Hermitage Museum – from Sergei Eisenstein's *October* (1928), returning 35 minutes later with the multiple stormings of the Louvre in the 19th century. Steyerl's opening imagery is unambiguous: museums, historically at least, have always been important sites of political and military conflict. Yet what of the museum – and battlefield – today?

Steyerl then cuts to excerpts from her own film, *Abstract* (2012) which includes footage of her in the mountains of south eastern Turkey where her friend and longtime subject of her films, Andrea Wolf, was taken capture and executed in 1998 when fighting for the PKK. Capturing the shells that most likely killed Wolf and her 38 comrades (namely the Hellfire missile launched form Cobra helicopters), the edit moves to a shot of Steyerl pointing an iPhone at the headquarters of Lockhead Martin in Berlin, the missile's manufacturers. Steyerl's "shot" of Lockhead Martin, first included in *Abstract*, asks us to consider cinematic and military devices as not

only lexical siblings but as potent weapons of destruction and exposure. Telling the audience she bought one of the shells, Steyerl raises her thumb and forefinger as if holding a bullet. The bullet, though clearly traced form battlefield to Berlin by camera, when bought into the lecture theatre of a contemporary art space, dissolves into invisibility: 'Once you take it into an art space it somehow vanishes form sight', Steyerl later tells us. Such is the power of art to suspend disbelief – or to render true motivations opaque. Interestingly, Steyerl's own practice has shifted from being primarily film-based (where the camera could shoot and make visible) into a more fluid blend of lectures and performances that pop up in art events the world over, meaning that the switch to invisibility seems in part due to her own over-exposure.

Moving on, Steyerl jumps to an overhead shot of the Lockhead Martin headquarters – its pointed shape, designed by Frank Gehry, bears an uncanny resemblance to the shells fired at Wolf. The reason for the similarity, Steyerl asserts, is that both building and weapon were designed using the same computer software and that somewhere a 'bitt-flip' occurred, transforming a missile into a piece of 'contemporary starchitecture'. The links between architecture and the military are not only financial but, more worryingly perhaps, in the tools used to produce both. With 'starchitects' producing a new wave of feudal museums popping up in Abu Dhabi or St Petersburg – as is the case with a rendering of OMA's designs for the Hermitge becoming a new Guggenheim franchise – Steyerl's argument goes further: 'Is the revolution a prelude to all out gentrification?'

Steyerl's historical and conceptual jumps from the Bolsheviks to OMA, via the PKK and Lockhead Martin, delivered with a smirk and a twinkle in the eye, are both raucous and prescient. Yet as she begins to implicate herself in this equation, things get interesting. Following the missile shell form the "average" battlefield of south-eastern Turkey backwards, Steyerl finds herself staring at *Abstract* in the Art Institute of Chicago with her iPhone

raised and the caption reading 'this is a shot'. Coming across her own work Steyerl asks: 'Did I fire the bullet that I found on the battlefield?'

Questions of complicity – even responsibility – hang over Steyerl's lecture, as they have hung over all forms of institutional critique for time immemorial. Yet her point is clear: the circulation of money and influence that encompasses the art world and emerges form military conflicts and government planning is pervasive and imminently hard to capture. Track it down in one place and it will pop up elsewhere. Indeed Steyerl goes further – stating that bullets fired in the vicinity of contemporary art, far from travelling in straight, detectable lines, circle us, passing from museum to 'starchitecture' to battlefield in an endless loop of deadly circulation, killing thousands on the way.

Not content with abstracted metaphors, Steyerl later hones in on the people and money behind the Istanbul Biennial. Showing an image of *Obussen II* (2010), an installation by Kris Martin comprised of a pile of bullets from the 2011 edition of the exhibition (which of course, manifested as mere art, are clearly visible in the gallery – as art they are harmless so let them be seen), Steyerl contends that here we should be asking not who fired these bullets but who sponsored them. Bringing up a range of names from the biennial's main sponsors, Ko Koç Holdings whose subsidiary Otokar produces the police armoured vehicles patrolling the city's streets during and after the protests; to Vestel, the producer of domestic drones or the arms manufacturer Ayestas. These sponsors are the reason that the curatorial and artistic positions in the biennial – which are unsurprisingly often ideological enemies to private weapons producers – have the means to flourish. It is a structural contradiction that is particularly prevalent in the globalised, and still-growing, list of worldwide biennial where corporate wealth, tainted if you look close enough, fuels blockbuster events that create new art markets in obscure parts of the world. 'Is', Steyerl then asks, 'there

a link between military conflict and movements in the art market?'

Again using Turkey as a prescient example Steyerl tracks the development in the art market back to rampant privatisation in the '80s following the military coup. Yet Turkey is but one example that Steyerl could have cited as she herself has written: 'From the deserts of Mongolia to the high plains of Peru, contemporary art is everywhere. And when it is finally dragged into Gagosian dripping from head to toe in blood and dirt, it triggers off round and rounds of rapturous applause'.[3] Steyerl's point is that the, 'unpredictable, unaccountable, brilliant, mercurial [and] moody' side of contemporary art appeals to a certain form of aspiring oligarch who most probably has dictatorial aspirations of his own.[4]

It is Steyerl's insistence on not only highlighting the links between neoliberal economics, what she calls, the transition to 'post-democracy' and contemporary art that are important.[5] Indeed, returning to the closing of Waalid Raad's essay we too could ask, 'do we really need another artwork to show us (as if we don't already know) that the cultural, financial, and military spheres are intimately linked?' What Steyerl does, however, is show that in the kernel of all of these spheres of influence lies the same elusive, speculative appeal. This is the most frightening of her proposals: that contemporary art, more than anything, embodies the very worst in our neoliberal, post-democratic moment and the museum – far form being the last vestige of civil society – is the battlefield itself.

Steyel's speculation – or accusation – dissects and unravels the fallacy that the museum, maligned since the Louvre's inception in the 19th century (beginning with Quatremère and rumbling on today), wrests culture from its source, detaching it from the fabric of the world and leaving it devoid of resonance. 'On the contrary', as Steyerl has written, 'it is squarely placed in the neoliberal thick of things'[6]. It is a point she makes even more explicitly in her film, *Guards* (2012) which

focuses on two security guards, Ron Hicks and Martin Whitfield, as a means to rough up the neutrality of the white cube beyond modernist recognition. In her text, "Is the Museum a Factory?",[7] Steyerl had previously looked at the museum as a site that is both monitored and surveyed but that remains invisible to the outside world. Yet in *Guards*, she pushes the argument, extending the frames of reference beyond notions of the production and labour performed in the museum, to examine the art institution as a heavily policed, contested site.

Seen alongside Steyerl's Istanbul lecture, *Guards* is less polemic, quieter and more specific in its claims. Take the language of contemporary art and its re-emergence – or roots – in military practice. In one section, Ron Hicks 'runs the walls' of the gallery – emblazoned with funders' names – arms extended. He is ready to 'engage' the target, the word's utterance echoing with visitor's *engagement* with works of art or of *socially-engaged* practice. Martin Whitfield, wandering through the airy spaces of the Art Institute Chicago with the male heavyweights of modernism drenching its interior, talks about his considerations when addressing a space. He talks of 'points of view', 'lines of sight', asking, 'what are the advantages we can take in terms of the use of the space?' – all very valid curatorial questions (or certainly for a display of blue-chip abstraction) posed by an ex-navy officer. And when Steyerl superimposes video footage of police shootings – one of which Whitfield recounts, modernist masters make way for helicopter shots of a shootout in sub-urban America and the museum's emergence from the far-away clouds of AbEx to an embodiment of contemporary conflicts is complete.

Towards the end of the film, Hicks accosts the intruder to the museum, finding him in a black box showing shots form military helicopters zooming in on targets. Here the intruder is finally 'engaged'. Film and its presentation in the museum are, by inference, where contemporary conflicts come to the boil, for good or bad. It is where intruders (conceptual, financial, military

or political) can be rooted out and taken down.

Cut to the theatre of the Istanbul Biennial, and we remember this is where Steyerl traced herself back to, wondering whether this was the place from which shots were fired. Most probably it was. Revealingly, it is in the black box that this lecture will now be placed, morphing, with the help of Steyerl's own editorial 'bit-flipp' from biennial lecture into film – from a performance of her own cultural labour into a projected reappraisal of the art institution. If Steyerl has been forced to mutate her modes of address to appease the increasingly ravenous art world, then film seems to remain her weapon of choice. More revealing still, perhaps is that at her survey exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum, Steyerl shows this film as part of the trilogy of films alongside *November* (2004) and *Lovely Andrea* (2007) (with *Abstract* formerly as its the third component). Where she had previously used *Abstract* to centre on the crossovers and complexities of the grammar of cinema and the grammar of warfare now the grammar – and violence – of museums has been bought into focus.

At the end of her talk, Steyerl asserts that we must now not only storm the museum – the Hermitage, the Louvre or its new pumped up stunt double in the Gulf – but the screens and clouds, 'that transform bullets into art spam and reality into realty'. Giving us a short instruction manual, Steyerl explains that by using the flashlight on our cameras (one of the applications least likely to be hacked or monitored) we should shine the light on our own hand and grab the invisible bullet that has been flying around art spaces and battlefields, killing thousands of people en route. 'Now, with a flick of the wrist, curl the bullet the other way'.

For all of Steyerl's historical and visual crossovers, her sly wit and self-deprecation – her closing message (seemingly aimed at herself, the audience in the lecture theatre and the viewer in the black box) is cut and dry: if you are immersed in the circling bullets of the contemporary art world, the origins of which flex back

and forth from sites of war to fund raising galas – take agency. The contemporary art museum never has and never will be a neutral space. In Steyerl's nightmare scenario the contemporary museum - in a morphed version of Benjamin's take on how politics is aestheticized by those in power - would show genocide in the form of CGI info graphics and digital human rights appeals, viewed from a camera attached to a drone. 'This', as Steyerl says, 'is totally unsatisfactory as it still accepts the white cube as a neutral frame'.[8] The museum as a battlefield from which to defend and fight is an altogether different proposal. Only by making visible and countering the conflicted nature of what Moti rightly identified as, the merging of the 'cultural, technological, financial and military sectors', do we have any hope of stopping the bloodshed entering (or emanating from) museums. What's more, as Steyerl's closing makes patently clear – the screen (or video, or artwork) remains a prime weapon with which to fire.

1 Walid Raad, "Walkthrough, Part I", *e-flux journal* no. 48 (2013), accessed March 2014, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/walkthrough-part-i/.

2 At the time of writing the chairman of the Sydney Biennial, Luca Belgiorno-Nettis has just resigned after a group of artists boycotted the event. The artists' position was based on the fact that Belgiorno-Nettis, whose father Franco founded the biennial in 1973, is also chairman of Transfield Holdings, a subsidiary of Transfield Services is a contractor for Australia's network of immigration centres that recently won a billion-dollar deal to run the controversial Manus Island centre. See, Michael Saffi and Paul Farrell, "Sydney Biennale chairman quits over company's links to detention centres", *The Guardian*, March 7, 2014, accessed March 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/mar/07/sydney-biennale-chairman-quits-transfield-detention.

3 Hito Steyerl, "Politics of Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy," in *e-flux journal* no. 21 (2010), accessed March 2014, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Hito Steyerl, "Is a Museum a Factory?" in *e-flux journal* no. 6 (2009), accessed March 2014 http://www.e-flux.com/journal/is-a-museuma-factory/.

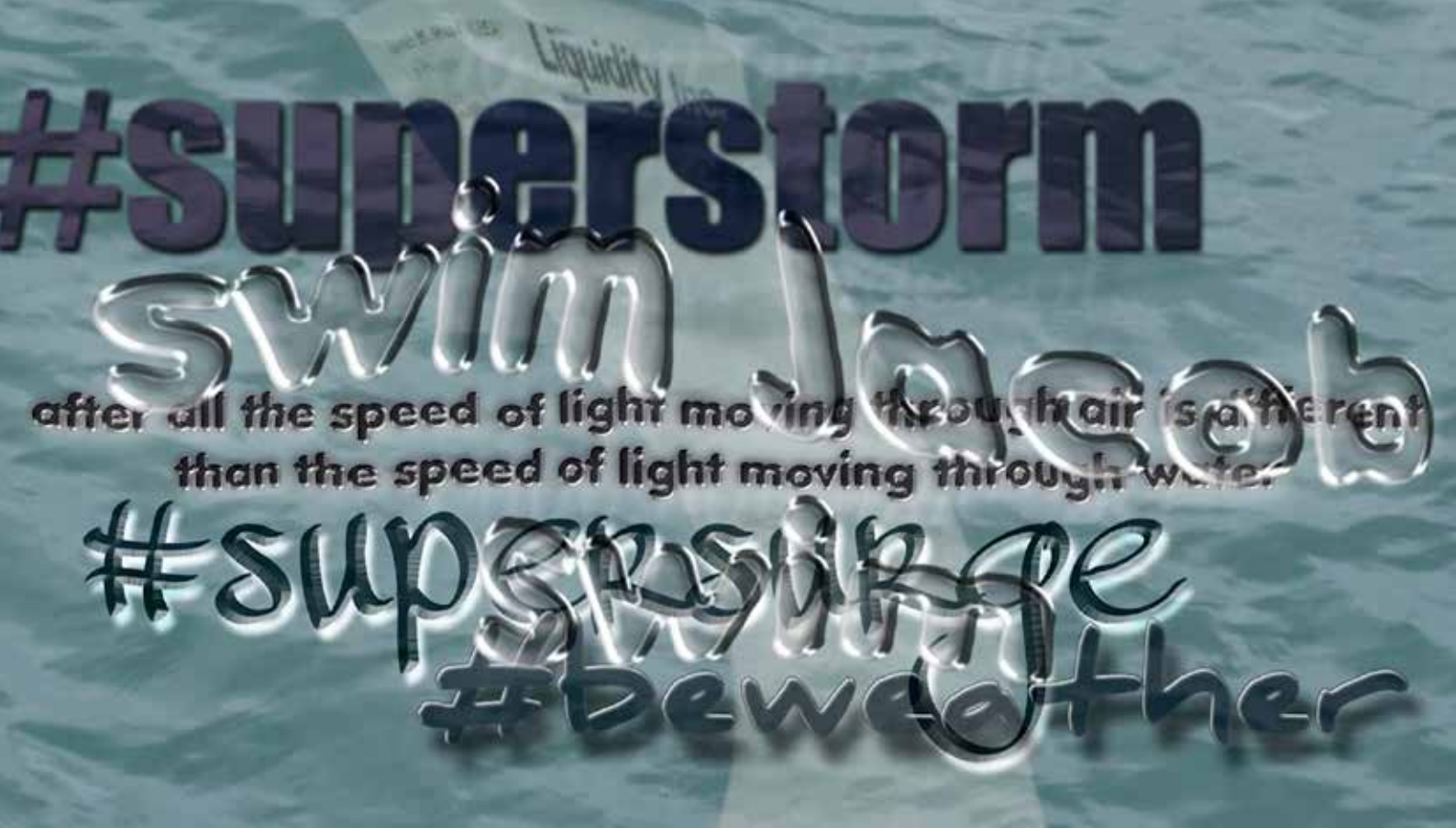
8 Ibid.


I am water


blood
risk
stream
tsunami
tears
capital
leak
as rainbow
flood
torrent
wave
ice
numbers
cloud
twister
weather
sweat
statistic distribution
flow
polygons
I am liquidity incorporated




TFA

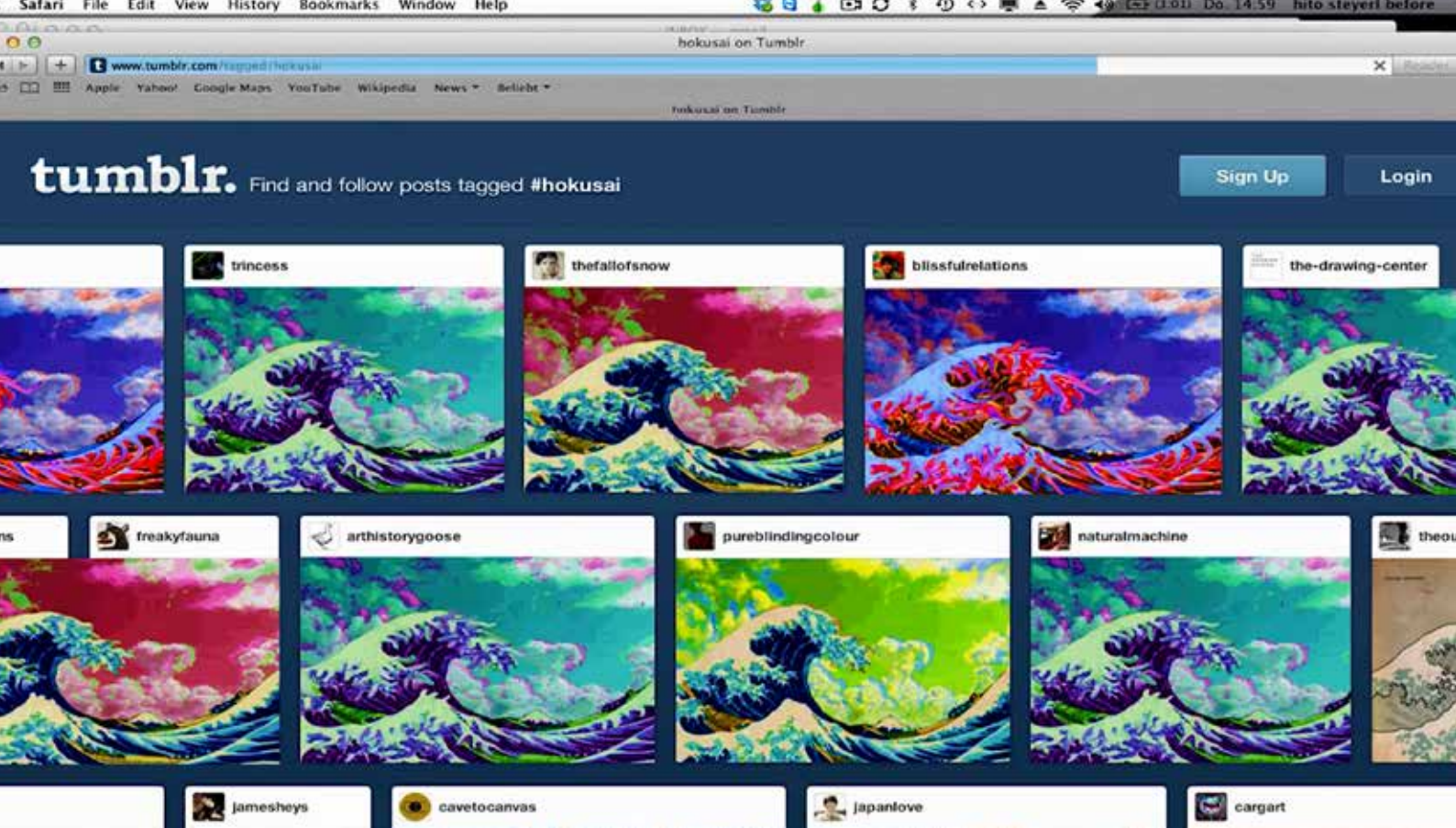

#superstorm
swim lasso
after all the speed of light moving through air is different
than the speed of light moving through water.
#supersurge
#beweather

4:39
Friday, May 17
slide to unlock


TCR 01:04:59:14




WEATHER REPORT


Safari File Edit View History Bookmarks Window Help
hokusai on Tumblr
www.tumblr.com/tagged/hokusai
Apple Yahoo! Google Maps YouTube Wikipedia News Beliebt
tumblr. Find and follow posts tagged #hokusai
Sign Up
Login
trincess
thefallofsnow
blissfulrelations
the-drawing-center
freakyfauna
arthistorygoose
pureblindingcolour
naturalmachine
jamesheys
cavetocanvas
japanlove
cargart



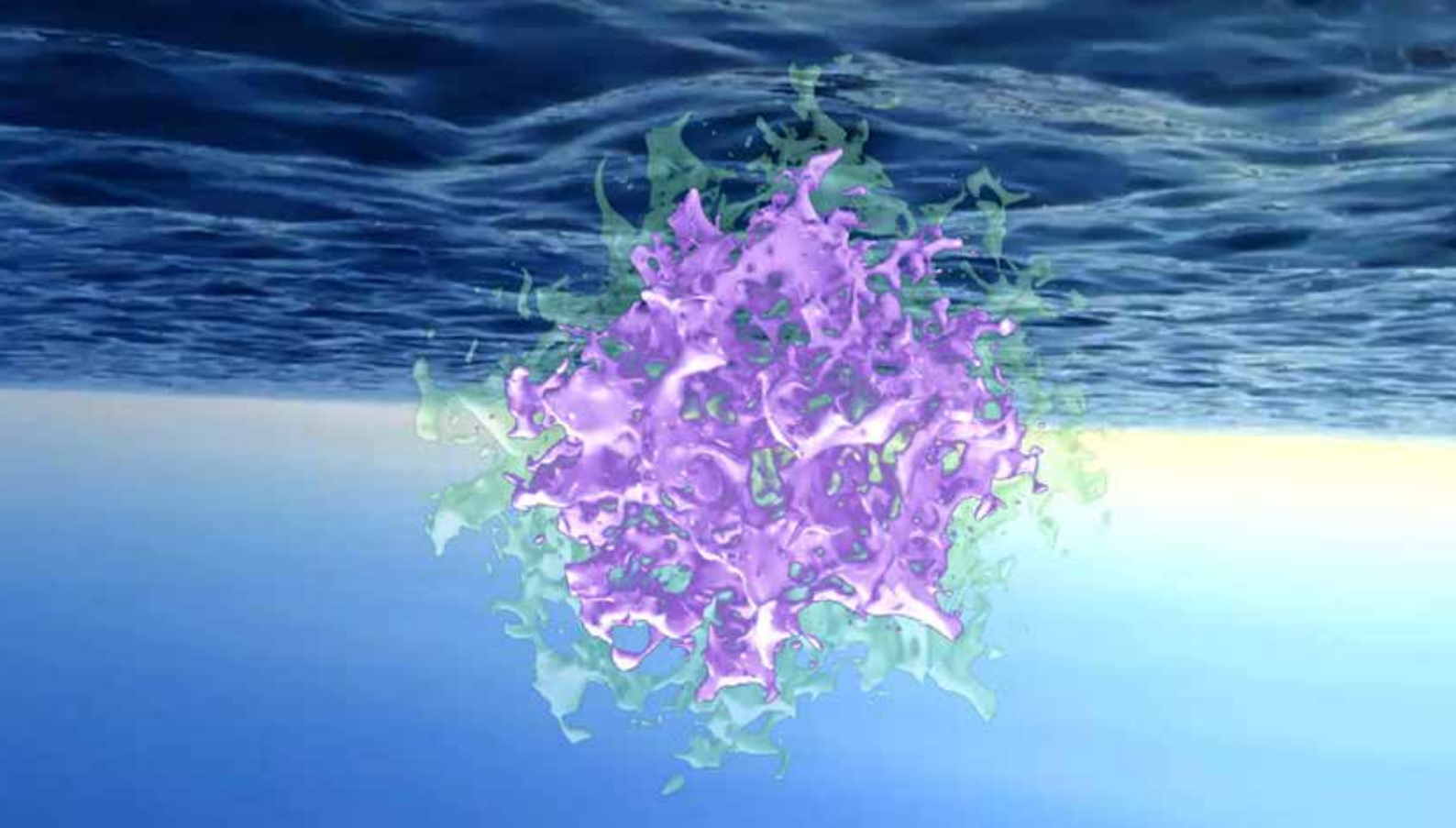

#THESTORMISBLOWING
y
M
Rate of Interest
#superstorm
LP
#supersurge
M
x
#Bewether
Money
Prof V Hallaswam

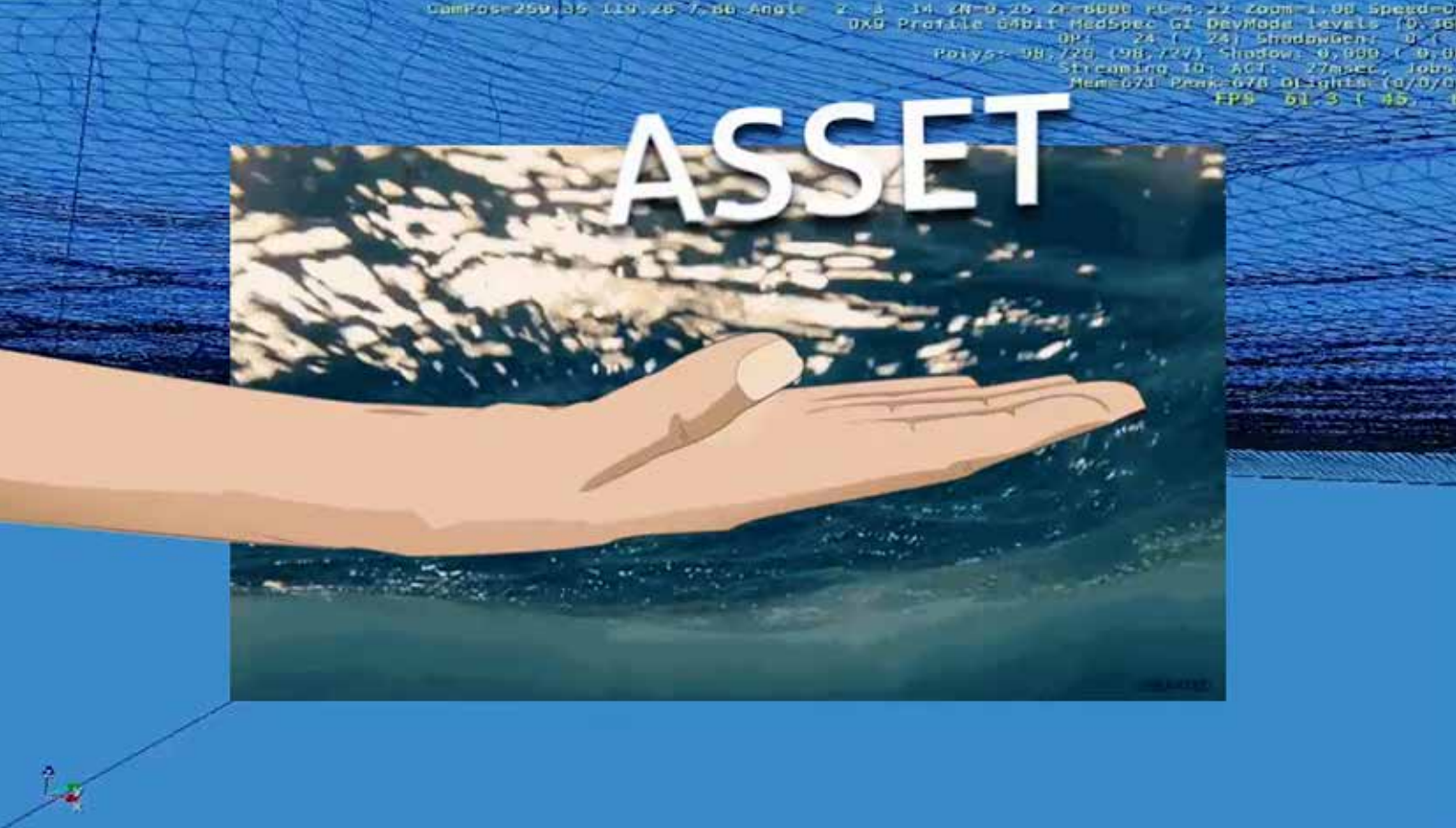

Boston
2:48 PM
New York
2:48 PM
CNN
NEWS ROOM
GOOGLE GLASS: FIRST LOOK
It takes photos, video, sends text messages
LIVE CNN
TAURANTS AND RETAIL SEE LARGE EMPLOYMENT GAINS
CNN DEI
DOW 145.54


DOUGLAS R. ANDREW
NEW YORK TIMES BEST SELLING AUTHOR



or I was able to be in many places at the same time.




ASSET




THE CLOUD
weather-underground.com
THE NEW TERRITORY
Multinational Federation
Multiple Republics
RUSSIA
TURKEY
SYRIA
IRAN
PAKISTAN
SAUDI
ARABIA
CLOUD
VIRTUALISE
OUTSOURCE
Stateless
Non-
Autonomous
Areas
The jet stream changes direction, the Dow Jones collapses and also the trade winds down west.
Bifurcating
Country?


UNCHARTED TERRITORY
THE CLOUD
THE NEW TERRITORY
SOFTWARE AS A SERVICE
SAAS
Weak winds, if you finally manage to focus.

Karen Archey

Hyper-Elasticity Symptoms, Signs, Treatment: On Hito Steyerl's *Liquidity Inc.*

If we recall the year 1995 and the gestational stages of the dot-com boom, the West's cultural imaginary was tellingly gripped by the nerdy-sexy-cool cyberpunk, the "terrorist" more at home online than off. Netscape Communications, creator of the erstwhile popular Netscape Navigator web browser, made an extremely successful IPO the same year, the company switching from being unprofitable to valued at $2.9 billion in one business day. The movies *Hackers* and *The Net* were both released in 1995 – who can forget the razor-sharp, pillow-lipped cyber-terrorist portrayed by Angelina Jolie – cementing that, in the mid-'90s, nothing was a more exciting or fraught territory, economically or socially, than the internet. 'All I remember is when I looked at my computer screen in the morning, you could see the companies that were just growing in value,' explains former financial analyst Jacob Wood, star subject of Hito Steyerl's video *Liquidity Inc.* (2014):

> *'That started in the internet boom around 1995 when Netscape went public…Whether or not [these companies] were making money or whether they had no business model, people just wanted a part of that action. You could just throw money anywhere at that time. Things were blowing up. At that time, we thought everything would be internet-based and that we were entering a new world.'*

Wood's last statement is the most telling: at that historical moment, we were so untethered by the introduction of the Internet that we thought the digital would subsume every aspect of our lives, perhaps even our bodies and minds. These speculative conditions continue to pop up contemporaneously, ad nauseam, many of them seemingly fabricated. We hear about exhaustion from unending streams of images; Ray Kurzweil's *The Singularity* (professing that eventually artificial intelligence will supersede human intelligence); as well as our attention spans, says Nicholas Carr, that are becoming fractured and more shallow. But, in contradistinction to the cultural consciousness of 1995, what marks our current moment

is the continued subsistence of the haptic, and how data – specifically corporate-farmed data – suffuses not just our activity on the web, but also our experiences offline. This data, which could be described as "performance-enhancing", permeates previously established boundaries of the digital and the real, dictating advances in product design, branding, interior architecture and so on. Steyerl's recent essay "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?",[1] which covers similar ground as *Liquidity Inc.*, proffers that the proliferation of data in contemporary society transcends the distinction between IRL and online space. Likewise, what is an image but code, and what is code but text? This condition of digital-physical liquidity, suggests Steyerl, characterises our contemporary historical moment.

As luck would have it, Wood did eventually enter a new world – not digitally, but professionally. Rather, Wood lost his job as an analyst amidst the 2008 economic crash, switching fields to fight professionally in Mixed Martial Arts, which had previously been his hobby. We all know these situations: play becomes a job, your friends become employers, sleep turns into "me time". These transitional states and the precarity accompanying them, are so difficult to navigate that they become nearly incomprehensible. Such tangled, fluid strata of work, life, and play (and their relationship to the 2008 economic crash) lie at the heart of *Liquidity Inc.*.

Both words and images related to the subject of "liquidity" flow ambiguously throughout Steyerl's half-hour video, the term referencing financial assets and high frequency trading, water and its manifestation as weather, as well as the necessary elasticity of the post-Fordist labourer. Images run the gamut from thousands of dollars worth of CGI to clip art didactics with anime scenes and charged blips from art history (Hokusai's *Great Wave off Kanagawa* (1829-32) and Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920)) thrown in for good measure.

The "inc." in *Liquidity Inc.* refers to Jacques Derrida's book *Limited Inc.* (1988), and its refutation of speech-act theory theorised by John Searle. Practically, the term "incorporation" describes both the processes of assuming

bodily form as well as a company becoming a legal entity. Incorporation entails 'the act of uniting several persons into one fiction called a corporation, in order that they may be no longer responsible for their actions.'[2] The term's etymological roots further evince its function in describing the liquidity and changing states of matter that Steyerl focuses on:

> "incorporation" coming from the late Latin *incorporat-* 'embodied,' from the verb *incorporare*, from in- 'into' + Latin *corporare 'form into a body'* (from *corpus, corpor- 'body'*).

More traditional in format than *Liquidity Inc.*, Steyerl's past work usually conforms to a well-worn narrative structure. *Adorno's Grey* (2012), for example, reflects on the abstract theories of the philosopher through the story of three female students flashing their breasts mid-lecture at Adorno, who promptly ran out of the room, never to return to the Academy. Equally, *How Not to Be Seen. A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013), takes the form of a seven-point education video, teaching us, albeit somewhat hyperbolically, how to disappear in an age marked by machine surveillance. *Liquidity Inc.* however, evades both a guiding narrative and operational structure – the video's slippery form matching its content. Within *Liquidity Inc.*'s watery world, this dispersed focus is echoed by the diversity of subjects, images, narrators and soundtracks, endlessly popping up, dissolving and looping. Surf footage inlaid into iPhone or television screens pops up frequently, further suggesting that the contemporary condition of liquidity calls for the subject to quickly skid along at surface level, or else, perhaps, they'll drown. 'Water can flow or it can crash,' says Bruce Lee, who has been pasted into an iPhone screen. 'Be formless, be shapeless… Be water, my friend.'

The biography and commentary of Jacob Wood, the former Lehmann Brothers analyst, provides the video's only narrative arc, and even this remains loosely hewn. Through Wood, the allusion of water is tied to financial precarity, both athletic and professional performance, as well as positional

elasticity. We see Wood going through the motions of his old morning routine – getting ready to work as an analyst, putting on a suit and tie, sitting at a desk while reflecting on his professional transition to working in Mixed Martial Arts. "You've got to adapt to whatever is happening," Wood says of his being laid off.

> *'It's kind of like fighting […] what you saw [in martial arts] was people becoming hybrid fighters. They became versed in everything. That's what makes [MMA] so exciting. That's what makes things liquid and fluid.'*

Wood's take on liquidity speaks to the advantageous effects of mass adaptability. If you can kickbox, know judo and karate in MMA fights, you'll probably outperform your opponent who is only versed in jiu jitsu. Likewise, mass adaptability is now a necessity professionally and economically and financial liquidity – as an infomercial presenter reminds us in *Liquidity Inc*.– is our lifeline to basic necessities such as food and rent in the case of economic catastrophe, such as what many experienced in 2008. 'You don't want to be frozen, that's the kiss of death,' says Jacob, 'so you're always being liquid and moving whether you're striking, faking fainting, or doing take-downs. That's why, in a fight, they'll always keep the action moving.' It has become necessary to diversify in order to financially "stay afloat", regardless of whether work-induced ADHD allows us to focus. Artists too, are far from immune to this – becoming the flexible worker *par excellence*. Steyerl, for example, must teach, write and maintain an artistic practice full time.

Some of Steyerl's previous videos have often drawn meaning through serendipitously timed events, such as *In Free Fall* (2011), which focuses on the year 1929 – e.g. the previous major stock market crash, the publishing of Sergei Tetyakov's "The Biography of the Object," the filming of *Hell's Angels*, etc. etc. – *Liquidity Inc*.'s formlessness places the onus on the viewer to manifest their own conclusions about the significance of her juxtapositioned subjects. What could be the connection between 'mass aesthetics' and

corporate aesthetics, or that betwixt a pulsating animated GIF of Hokusai and a laid-off financial analyst? Notably, Steyerl's shift to a more porous relationship between concept and form developed simultaneous to the increased demand for her work as an artist – her content perhaps embodying the professional schizophrenia experienced by the artist. This heightened focus on Steyerl's work seems at least in part due to the art world finally waking up to idea that it is incumbent upon us to analyse our increasingly complex relationship to advanced technology and the circulation of images – a field Steyerl has long championed and to which the litany of younger artists who revere her work bears testament.

Returning to the film, footage of Jacob and MMA fights give way to a fictionalised, rather poetic weather report by "terrorists", a scene inspired by the real-life website The Weather Underground, which curiously took its title from the late 20th century American radical Leftist terrorist group of the same name (who in turn took it from a lyric in the Bob Dylan song *Subterranean Homesick Blues* (1965)). These terrorists, one a man in sunglasses and the other a young girl, are disguised in oversized owl T-shirts and ski masks. The older man, in a computer-generated English drawl, states,

> *'You will ask yourself questions like: what is the history of wind? How did this gust arrive here? Where did it come from and who am I to be blown by it? The storm is blowing people back to their homes, blowing goods back to their factories blowing factories back to their countries, blowing people back into their past.'*

The report is given against a green-screened map of trade winds and blinking animated gifs of Hokusai's *The Great Wave Off Kanagawa*. Weather, notably, remains one of the few forces that man consistently tries and fails to control, and is dominated by narratives as bizarre as Wilhelm Reich's cloudbusters, which feature in *Liquidity Inc*.

One can also attribute Steyerl's interest in the cloud to the geopolitics of cloud computing: like the weather, cloud

computing is a system invisible and almost incalculably sublime to the common man, but has its roots in very real phenomena; specifically, servers regulated by the government of the nation in which these structures are located. (This is why, for example, the American government would have access to information about a Finnish person's purchase from Amazon, even if that transaction happened on a computer in Finland, because Amazon's servers exist on American soil.) The lack of the public's widespread familiarity with these policies illustrates our current passive relationship to understanding the social and political ramifications of network technology.

Steyerl's allusions to terror and collapse all suggest that systems such as weather and financial trading are structurally unstable. The video's beginning splices clips of Jacob fighting or narrating his personal history to CGI of water, which, in a feat of elastic identity, serves as the video's silent narrator. 'I am water and I am not from here,' says the water in bubbly silver lettering.

> *'…Some would like to claim me as a native of earth, but in fact, even though I cover this planet, I am not from here. Nor are you. I run through your veins. Your eyes. Your touchscreens and portfolios. I am gushing through your heart, plumbing and wires. I am liquidity incorporated.'*

This sublime fact – that, 60% of the human body is composed of an extraterrestrial element – suggests a literal and figurative alienation to our own bodies, one heightened, in the Marxist sense, by late capitalism. The otherworldly narrator's radical perspective on our current historical moment defamiliarises us with the more absurd aspects of contemporary life to which we've become inured. Why do we work 12-hour days? Why do the 85 richest people in the world have as much wealth as the 3.5 billion poorest? Why is Chelsea Manning, a woman who helped uncover grave human rights atrocities, one of the most condemned human beings on the planet? If a "crash" suggests the dissolution of a preexisting system or structure – whether it be personal

as in the case of a nervous break down, or societal as in the case of a stock market crash – the rebuilding period after the cataclysmic event is perhaps the most telling.

While it seems cumbersome to make neat conclusions about Steyerl's work, there's a telling moment towards the end of *Liquidity Inc.*. Announcing the weather, the child terrorist-meteorologist recites, 'Low pressure system Andrea Wolf moving east this evening. Compact tear gas clouds gathering after midday. Weak winds, if you finally manage to focus.' Here, Steyerl again draws in her childhood friend and radical leftist activist Andrea Wolf, who died in 1998 as a political martyr of the Kurdistan Worker's Party. Given that it has been 15 years since Wolf's death, her constant appearance in Steyerl's work (Wolf is at least mentioned in all Steyerl's videos, and forms the main subject of several, including *November* (2004) and *Abstract* (2012)) transitions from a work of mourning into a gesture of solidarity. Similar to Jean-Luc Godard's solidarity with Vietnam, as told in his film *Camera-Eye* (1967), which led him to at least cursorily reference the country in the rest of his films, Steyerl has continually used Wolf to point outside the spheres of artistic practice and academia into the realm of world politics.

What are world politics in the West today, but images and text, again, made up of code? Steyerl's allusions to Wolf act as prescient reminder that agency, increasingly indistinguishable in late capitalism, exists in varying shades – and are, outside of Western contexts, variably more dark, or potentially a site for radical change.

1 Hito Steyerl, "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?", in *e-flux journal* no. 49 (2013), accessed March 2014, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/.

2 "Incorporation," online, accessed March 2014, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=incorporation&searchmode=none.

Credits

All images © Hito Steyerl,
courtesy Wilfried Lentz Rotterdam.



pp. 13—28
How Not to Be Seen. A Fucking Didactic Educational .Mov File

2013, HD video file, single screen, 14 min.

Director of Photography Berlin:
Christoph Manz
Director of Photography Los Angeles:
Kevan Jenson
2nd unit:
Leon Kahane
AD:
Esme Buden, Alwin Franke
Postproduction:
Christoph Manz, Alwin Franke
Make-Up and Costume Design:
Lea Søvsø
Choreography and Performance:
Arthur Ständi
Producer:
Kevan Jenson
Dolly Grip Los Angeles:
Tony Rudenko, Peter Jenson
Educational Dummy:
Hito Steyerl
Commissioned by:
Massimiliano Gioni, Venice Biennale
Supported by the International Production Fund (IPF) - 2013 partners: Outset England, Dermegon Daskalopoulos Foundation for Culture and Development, Outset USA, Outset Netherlands with Promoters Van Abbemuseum, Maurice Marciano Family Foundation
Thank you to:
Brian Kuan Wood, Meggie Schneider, Laura Poitras, Diana McCarty, Christopher Kulendran Thomas, Anton Vidokle



pp. 41—44
Strike

2010, single channel HD video file, 25 sec.



pp. 65—80
November

2004, single channel SD video file, 25 min.

Director:
Hito Steyerl
Editor:
Stefan Landorf
Assistant:
Yasmina Dekkar
Protagonist:
Uli Maichle
Producer:
Marta Kuzma, manifesta5
Supported by:
Klaus, Mehmet Aktas, Peter Grabher, Lisa Rosenblatt



pp. 93—108
Lovely Andrea

2007, single channel SD video file, 30 min.

Director:
Hito Steyerl
Performer and assistant director:
Asagi Ageha
Producer:
Osada Steve
Editor:
Stefan Landorf
Supported by:
Matthias J. Grimme,
Sylvia Schedelbauer and
many others
Commissioned by:
documenta 12



pp. 117—132
In Free Fall

2009, single channel HD video file, 30 min.

Director:
Hito Steyerl
Photography:
Kevan Jenson
Produced by:
Visualise This, Inc., Marius Babias, nbk, Picture This Bristol, Collective Edinburgh, Chisenhale Gallery London, Henie Onstad Museum Oslo
With Imri Kahn as historian/expert
Technical directors:
Christoph Manz,
Cristóvão A. dos Reis



pp. 149—160
Adorno's Grey

2012, single channel HD video projection, 14 min.

Protagonists:
Gerd Roscher, Nina Power,
Peter Osborne, anonymous protester
Camera, sound, edit, color:
Hito Steyerl
Large format photography:
Leon Kahane
Wall plot research and AD:
Alwin Franke
Conservators:
Benjamin Rudolph, Sina Klausnitz
Production managers:
Maike Banaski, Anna-Victoria Eschbach.
Postproduction:
Christoph Manz, Maria Frycz

Screen design:
Studio Miessen, Diogo Passarinho, Yulia Startsev
Produced by:
Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam
Supported by:
Nikolaus Hirsch, Sophie von Olfers, Claudia Stockhausen



pp. 169—178
Guards

2012, single channel 9:16
HD video, 19 min.

Protagonists:
Ron Hicks, Martin Whitfield,
Corey Burage, Modesto Correa,
Darrell Evans.
Director of photography:
Kevan Jenson
Dolly Grip:
Jordan Campagna
Produced by:
Lisa Dorin, Ben Thorp Brown,
Tracy Parker
Production Manager:
Tracy Parker
Assistant Director:
Ben Thorp Brown,
Alwin Franke (Berlin)
Editing:
Cristovao dos Reis
(assisted by Maria Frycz)
Postproduction and compositing:
Christoph Manz
Produced by:
Art Institute of Chicago
Security:
Hito Steyerl



pp. 177—184
Abstract

2012, double channel HD video
installation, 7 min.

Researcher:
Necat Sunar.
Translator:
Kawa Nemir, Erkal Ünal
Team:
Selim Yildiz, Tina Leisch, Ali Can,
Neman Kara, Siyar, Sahin Okay,
Apo, Christoph Manz, Maximilian
Schmötzer, Leon Kahane
Music:
Brian Kuan Wood
Thank you:
Esme Buden, Necati Sönmez, Human
Rights Film Festival Istanbul,
Oliver Rein, Bilgin Ayata, Diana
McCarty, Lisa Dorin, Andrea Phillips,
Fulya Erdemci, Kevser Güler,
Hendrik Folkerts, Övül Durmosoglu,
Anton Vidokle, Rabih Mroué



pp. 197—220
Liquidity Inc.

2014, single channel HD video file,
30 min.

With Jacob Wood
MMA experts:
Rage Ng and Maverick
“The Soulcollector” Harvey
Weather Underground:
Brian Kuan Wood, Esme Buden
and Maximilian Brauer
Technical director and director of
photography Berlin:
Christoph Manz
Producer and director of photography
Los Angeles:
Kevan Jenson
Lighting director Los Angeles:
Tony Rudenko
Graphic design and assistant post:
Maximilian Schmoetzer
2nd unit:
Leon Kahane
Clips by:
Misha Maximov and John Boswell
(Melody Sheep)
Commissioned by:
David Riff and Ekaterina Degot
Weather:
Brian Kuan Wood
Nervous breakdown:
Hito Steyerl



pp. 229—231
Red Alert

2007, installation on
3 computer montitors, 2007.

Hito Steyerl

Born 1966, München, Germany

Selected solo exhibitions

2014
Institute of Contemporary Arts, London
'How Not to Be Seen. A Fucking Didactic Educational.Mov File', Kunstverein Stuttgart, Stuttgart
Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City
Redcat, Los Angeles
Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York
Ashkal Alwan, Beirut
'How Not to Be Seen. A Fucking Didactic Educational.Mov File', Fotofest Houston, Houston

2013
Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York
Audain Gallery, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver
'Guards', Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, San Diego
12x12 Videolounge, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin

2012
Wilfried Lentz Rotterdam
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago
E-flux, New York
Overgaden Institut for Samtidskunst, Copenhagen Art Festival, Copenhagen

2011
Studiengalerie 1.357, Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurt
Wilfried Lentz Gallery, Rotterdam

2010
Chisenhale Gallery, London
Picture This, Bristol
The Collective Gallery, Edinburgh
Museum Stuck, München
Henie-Onstad Art Center, Oslo

2009
Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin
'Der Bau', Linz Kulturhauptstadt, Linz
Pallas Projects, with Manon de Boer, Dublin
P74 Gallery, Ljubljana

2008
Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Kunsthalle Winterthur, Winterthur

2007

300m3 Art Space, Göteborg

2006

Signal Center För Samtidskonst, with Martin Jacobson, Malmö

2004

Els Hanappe Underground, with Vangelis Vlahos, Athens

Selected group exhibitions

2014

International Film Festival Rotterdam, Rotterdam

'Time Pieces', Nordstern Videokunstzentrum, Gelsenkirchen

Insert 2014, New Delhi

2013

'Image Employment', MoMA PS1, New York

Octobarski Salon, Belgrade

'Momentuous Times', Centre for Contemporary Art Derry-Londonderry, Derry-Londonderry

'Agora', 4th Athens Biennale, Athens

'Mínima resistencia. Entre la identidad y la globalización', Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

'Mom, am I a Barbarian?' 13th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul

'Bad Girls', Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain de Lorraine, Metz

'Good Girls', National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest

'The Way of the Shovel: Art as Archeology', Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago

'9 Artists', Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis

'Double Indemnity', Cornerhouse, Manchester

'The Encyclopedic Palace', 55th Venice Biennial, Venice

International Center of Photography's Triennial, New York

'La Fabrique des images', SBC Galerie d'Art Contemporain, Montreal

'Public diary', Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Yebisu

International Festival for Art and Alternative Visions, Tokyo

2012

'Prompts & Triggers: Surplus Authors', Witte de With, Rotterdam

'Materiality', Alternativa 2012, Wyspa Institute of Art, Gdańsk

'Remote Control', Institute of Contemporary Arts, London

Nordstern Videokunstzentrum, Gelsenkirchen

Performance works at: Berlin Documentary Forum 2, Haus der Kulturen, Berlin

Tate Modern, London

Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin

2011

'Big Picture II (Zeitzonen)', K21 Kunstsammlung im Ständehaus, Düsseldorf

'Die Neue Galerie - Auftritt im Schloss!', Neue Galerie - Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel, Kassel

'The Global Contemporary. Kunstwelten nach 1989', Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe

'Seeing Is Believing', Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin

Hors Pistes Tokyo. Another Motion of Images. Art and Images Festival, Tokyo

'Antiphotojournalism', Foam Photography Museum Amsterdam, Amsterdam

Independent Art Fair, 548 West 22nd Street, New York

'Serious Games - Krieg - Medien - Kunst', Museum Künstlerkolonie, Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt, Darmstadt

2010

CPH: DOX Copenhagen international Documentary film Festival, Copenhagen

'Un Luga Fuera de la Historia', Museo Tamayo, Mexico City

'Antiphotojournalism', La Virreina. Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona

'Vectors of the Possible', Basis voor Actuele Kunst, Utrecht

1st Ural Industrial Biennial, Ural Branch of the National Center for Contemporary Arts, Ekaterinburg

'10TB' Taipei Biennial 2010, Taipei

'The storyteller', Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju
'Auto-Kino!', Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin, Berlin
'Everyday Ideologies - Zeitläufe, Lebenswege',Kunstmuseum Kloster Unser Lieben Frauen, Magdeburg

2009

'The View from Elsewhere', Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney
'Under Control', Krannert Art Museum, Illinois
'El Passado en el Presente', LABoral. Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial, Gijon
The Florida Experimental Film and Video Festival, Florida
'The Porn Identity', Kunsthalle Wien, Wien
'Best of Kunstfilmbiennale', Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid
Clermont - Ferrand International Short Film Festival, Clermont - Ferrand
'The Storyteller', Independent Curators International, New York
'Audi, Video, Disco', Kunsthalle Zürich, Zürich
'Zones of Conflict', Pratt Manhattan Gallery, New York

2008

'Dispersion', Institute of Contemporary Arts, London
Videozone 4, International Video Art Biennial, Tel-Aviv
Octobarski Salon, Belgrade
U-Turn Kvadriennale for Samtidskunst, Copenhagen
13th Pancevo Biennial, Pancevo
7th Shanghai Biennial, Shanghai
'Strom des Vergessens', Offenes Kulturhaus, Linz
'This is how History is Written', La Casa Encendida, Madrid
'Vertrautes Terrain', Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe
'The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art ', Center for Curatorial Studies and Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, New York

2007

'If you can't dance...', Museum of Modern Art, Antwerp
'If You Can't Dance…'
Documenta 12, Kassel
'Last news', Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łaźnia, Gdansk
'If you see something, say something', Mori Gallery, Sydney
KunstFilmBiennale, Köln

2006

The Unhomely, Phantom Scenes in Global Society', 2nd Biennale of Contemporary Art Seville, Seville
Periferic 6, Biennial for Contemporary Art, Iași
'40 Jahre deutsche Videokunst', Zenntrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe
Videozone, International Video Art Biennial, Tel-Aviv
'A Picture of War is not war', Wilkinson Gallery, London

2005

'New Feminism - New Europe', Cornerhouse, Manchester
Contour Mechelen vzw, 2nd Biennial of Moving Image, Mechelen
'Die Regierung', Sezession, Wien
'Circa Berlin', Contemporary Art Center Nikolaj, Kopenhagen
'Das Neue Europa', Generali Foundation, Wien

2004

Manifesta 5, Donostia - San Sebastian
3rd Berlin Biennale, Berlin
'Based on a true story', Artists Space, New York

2003

City of Women, Ljubljana
'Es ist schwer das Reale zu berühren', Kunstverein München, München

2002

'Geschichten', Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg

2001

'Du bist die Welt', Wiener Festwochen, Wien

2000

Heimat Kunst, Berlin
'Continental Shift', Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen

1999

'Translocation', Generali Foundation, Wien

Catalogues

Michael Buhrs (ed.), RICOCHET #3: *Hito Steyerl*, Museum Villa Stuck, Bielefeld: Kerber Christof Verlag, 2010.

Hansen, Tone (ed.), *Hito Steyerl*, Henie Onstad Art Centre, Oslo: Torpedo Press, 2010.

Babias, Marius (ed.), *Hito Steyerl*, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Cologne: Verlag Walther König, 2009.

Monographs and collections (author)

Babias, Marius (ed.), *Jenseits der Repräsentation*. 04 *n.b.k. Diskurs*, Köln: Verlag Walther König, 2014.

Aranda, Julieta, Brian Kuan Wood and Anton Vidokle (eds.) *The Wretched of the Screen*, Berlin: Sternberg Press and e-flux, 2012.

Die Farbe der Wahrheit Dokumentarische Praxen im Kunstfeld, Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2008.

Anthologies and collections (editor/ coeditor)

Lind, Maria and Hito Steyerl (eds.), *The Greenroom Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary*, New York and Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008.

Es kommt darauf an, Books series, 7 volumes with texts by Klaus Neundlinger, Gayatri Spivak, John Holloway, Gerald Raunig, Chantal Mouffe, Paolo Virno, and Oliver Marchart (eds.), Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2005.

Grzinic, Marina, Jose Maria Mariategui, Marcus Neustetter, Oliver Ressler, Fondacio Rodriguez and Hito Steyerl (eds.), Tester, Fondacion Rodriguez, San Sebastian: Arteleku 2004

Gutierrez Rodriguez, Encarnación and Hito Steyerl (eds.), *Spricht die Subalterne deutsch? Postkoloniale Kritik und Migration*, Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2003.

2013

Turner, Michael: 'Michael Turner's Top 3 of 2013: Signs of Change'. *Canadian Art*, December 19. http://www.canadianart.ca/features/2013/12/19/michael-turner-picks/. Last accessed March 2014.

Elsaesser, Thomas: 'Lovely Andrea'. *Thomas Elsaesser Blog*, December. http://thomas-elsaesser.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=91%3Aneuer-berliner-kunstverein&catid=39%3Ablog-category-01&Itemid=69&limitstart=1. Last accessed March 2014.

Möller, Olaf: 'A Tale of Two Festivals'. *filmcomment*, November/December. http://www.filmcomment.com/article/festivals-venice-2013. Last accessed March 2014.

Abbe, Mary: 'Walker Art Center's '9 Artists' explores the messy reality of modern life'. *StarTribune*, October 31. http://www.startribune.com/entertainment/stageandarts/230087521.html. Last accessed March 2014.

Heiser, Jörg: 'Das Schweigen der Vernetzungsjunkies'. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 16. http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/nsa-affaere-in-der-kunst-das-schweigen-der-vernetzungsjunkies-12619171.html. Last accessed March 2014.

Kiyak, Mely: 'Zukunft erschaffen, nicht in der Vergangenheit ausgraben'. Interview with Hito Steyerl. *Berliner Zeitung*, September 28/29.

Birnbaum, Daniel: 'Das Ende des Optimismus'. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 26. http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunst/13-istanbuler-biennale-das-ende-des-optimismus-12593052.html. Last accessed March 2014.

Yildiz, Misal Adnan: 'Güncel sanat defteri'. *Taraf*, September 22. http://www.taraf.com.tr/misal-adnan-yildiz/makale-bienale-paralel-2-kamusal.htm. Last accessed March 2014.

Wilson-Goldie, Kaelen: 'Absent Presence'. *Artforum*, September 19. http://artforum.com/diary/id=43205. Last accessed March 2014.

Reichert, Kolja: 'Wir predigen

den Glauben'. *Die Welt*, September 14. http://www.welt.de/print/die_welt/kultur/article120014540/Wir-predigen-den-Glaeubigen.html. Last accessed March 2014.

Donadio, Rachel: 'A Canvas of Turmoil During Istanbul Biennial'. *New York Times,* September 13. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/14/arts/design/a-canvas-of-turmoil-during-istanbul-art-fair.html. Last accessed March 2013.

Oppolzer, Sabine: 'Kunstbiennale Istanbul. Gespräch mit Hito Steyerl'. ORF, September 13. http://oe1.orf.at/artikel/351618. Last accessed March 2014.

Conkelton, Sheryl: 'Traveling Images. Hito Steyerl'. *X TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly*, Summer. http://x-traonline.org/article/traveling-images/. Last accessed March 2014.

Pinto Teixeira, Ana: 'The Wretched of the Screen' Interview with Hito Steyerl. *MOUSSE 37*, February, pp. 48–53.

2012

Cotter, Holland: 'Memorials, Along with Some Mischief. Hito Steyerl Has New York Solo Debut at e-flux'. *New York Times*, December 20. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/21/arts/design/hito-steyerl-has-new-york-solo-debut-at-e-flux.html?_r=0. Last accessed March 2014.

Lekkerkerk, Niekolaas Johannes: 'Adorno's Grey. Hito Steyerl at Wilfried Lentz'. *Metropolis M*, November 28. http://metropolism.com/reviews/adorno-s-grey/. Last accessed March 2014.

Kleinman, Adam: 'Hito Steyerl's 'Adorno's Grey''. *Art Agenda*, November 21. http://www.art-agenda.com/reviews/hito-steyerl%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Cadorno%E2%80%99s-grey%E2%80%9D/. Last accessed March 2014.

Franke, Alwin: 'Surface Manifestations'. Overgaden Exhibition Folder Hito Steyerl, *The Kiss*, August 24–October 21. http://www.overgaden.org/exhibition/eng_folder/111/Hito_UK.pdf. Last accessed March 2014.

Petrovic-Šteger, Maja: 'Tracing the Dead'. Overgaden Exhibition Folder Hito Steyerl, *The Kiss*, August 24-October 21. http://www.overgaden.org/exhibition/eng_folder/111/Hito_UK.pdf. Last accessed March 2014.

2011

de Blaaij, Remco: 'Hito Steyerl: *Journal No. 1 & In Free Fall'*. Metropolis M 2, April/May, p. 97.

2010

Seddon, Max: 'Hito Steyerl'. *Artforum*, December 1. http://artforum.com/archive/id=26912. Last accessed March 2014.

Herbert, Martin: 'Hito Steyerl'. *Time Out London*, November 25. http://www.timeout.com/london/art/event/41050/hito-steyerl. Last accessed March 2014.

Trilling, Daniel: 'Out of the Ether: Hito Steyerl's *In Free Fall'. British Film Institute*, November. http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/reviews/specials/in-free-fall.php>. Last accessed January 2014.

Crone, Bridget: 'Matter Loves, Matter Lives, Matter Loves—the affective labour of the image in Hito Steyerl's *In Free Fall*'. APEngine, October 8.http://www.apengine.org/2010/10/matter-loves-matter-lives-matter-loves/. Last accessed March 2014.

Leung, Gil: 'After Before Now: Notes on *In free Fall*', Picture This Library, August 8. http://www.picture-this.org.uk/library/essays1/2010/after-before-now-notes-on-in-free-fall. Last accessed March 2014.

Schmitz, Jenny Gil: 'Todas la películas de Hito Steyerl: La obra de la ensayista audiovisual puede verse en Loop 2010'. *Cahiers du Cinéma España* 36, July/August, p. 50.

Lønningdal, Ingrid: 'Bildets sirkulasjon og doble betydninger'. Interview with Hito Steyerl. *Billedkunst 4*, June 22. http://www.billedkunstmag.no/node/1878. Last accessed March 2014.

Ulekleiv, Line: 'Rødt for terror: Tyske Hito Steyerl viser sammenhenger mellom japansk bondage, Spider-Man og amerikansk terrorfrykt'. *Morgenbladet*, June 11. http://morgenbladet.no/kultur/2010/rodt_for_terror. Last accessed March 2014.

Iversen, Trude Schjelderup: ‚Ti spørsmål: Hito Steyerl'. Interview with Hito Steyerl. *Kunstkritikk*, May 20. http://www.kunstkritikk.no/artikler/ti-sp%C3%B8rsmal-hito-steyerl/. Last accessed March 2014.

Boenzi, Francesca: 'Do You

Speak Spamsoc?' Interview with Hito Steyerl. *MOUSSE 23*, March 10. http://moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=540. Last accessed March 2014.

2009

Reichert, Kolja: 'Das Tosen der Turbinen; Krisenmetaphern: Die Filmkünstlerin Hito Steyerl stellt im Neuen Berliner Kunstverein aus'. *Der Tagesspiegel*, October 5, p. 24. http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/ausstellungen/Hito-Steyerl-Filmkunst;art2652,2915762. Last accessed March 2014.

Longinović, Tomislav Z: 'Archives Don't Burn: Hito Steyerl's Film *Journal No.1 – An Artist's Impression*'. *ARTMargins Online*, February 16. http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/archive/184-steyerls. Last accessed March 2014.

2008

Lack, Jessica: 'Artist of the Week 22: Hito Steyerl'. *The Guardian Unlimited*, December 31. http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2008/dec/30/contemporary-artist-hito-steyerl-new-wave. Last accessed March 2014.

Lafuente, Pablo: 'For a Populist Cinema: On Hito Steyerl's *November* and *Lovely Andrea*'. *Afterall* 19, Autumn/Winter, pp. 64–70. http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.19/populist.cinema.hito.steyerls.november.and.lovely. Last accessed March 2014.

Stakemeier, Kerstin: 'Minor Findings and Major Tendencies'. *Afterall* 19, Autumn/Winter, pp. 54–63. http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.19/minor.findings.and.major.tendencies. Last accessed March 2014.

Markt, Sebastian: 'In der Schwebe: Zu Bildern in Hito Steyerls L*ovely Andrea* und den Verhältnissen, in denen sie stehen'. *Kolik Film* 9, March, pp. 85–89.

2007

Debatty, Regine: 'A la recherche du cul perdu'. *We Make Money Not Art*, July 23. http://we-make-money-not-art.com/archives/2007/07/i-arrived-last.php#.UycMmfl5OSo. Last accessed March 2014.

Guerra, Carles: 'Documenta 12. Grandes aciertos, pero también muchas opacidades'. *La Vanguardia*, July 8.

Røssaak, Eivind: 'Filmen og det nakne liv'. *Kunstkritikk*, July 1. http://www.kunstkritikk.no/kritikk/filmen-og-det-nakne-liv/. Last accessed March 2014.

2004

Bracewell, Michael: 'Molotov Cocktails'. *Frieze* 87, November/December, pp. 94–97. https://www.frieze.com/issue/article/molotov_cocktails/. Last accessed March 2014.

Benzer, Christa: '*When Fiction Turns Into a Document Turns Back Into Fiction…*: Zu Hito Steyerls Videoessay *November*'. *Kolik Film* 2, October, pp. 135–137.

Fox, Dan: 'Manifesta 5 European Biennial of Contemporary Art'. *Frieze* 85, September, pp. 112–113.

Guerra, Carles: 'Operación Manifesta'. *La Vanguardia*, July 25, p. 14.

Colophon

Too Much World is published by
Sternberg Press, Berlin,
Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven and
Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane.

It is produced in conjunction with
Hito Steyerl's exhibitions at the
Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
(12 April – 22 June 2014) and
Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
(13 December 2014 – 21 March 2015)

Editor
Nick Aikens

Proofreading
Clare Butcher

Design
Bardhi Haliti

Printing
Lecturis, Eindhoven

ISBN: 978-3-95679-057-7

SternbergPress

Sternberg Press
Caroline Schneider
Karl-Marx-Allee 78
D-10243 Berlin
Germany
www.sternberg-press.com

IMA BRISBANE

Institute of Modern Art
Judith Wright Centre
420 Brunswick Street
PO Box 2176
Fortitude Valley
BC QLD4006, Brisbane
Australia
www.ima.org.au

vanabbemuseum

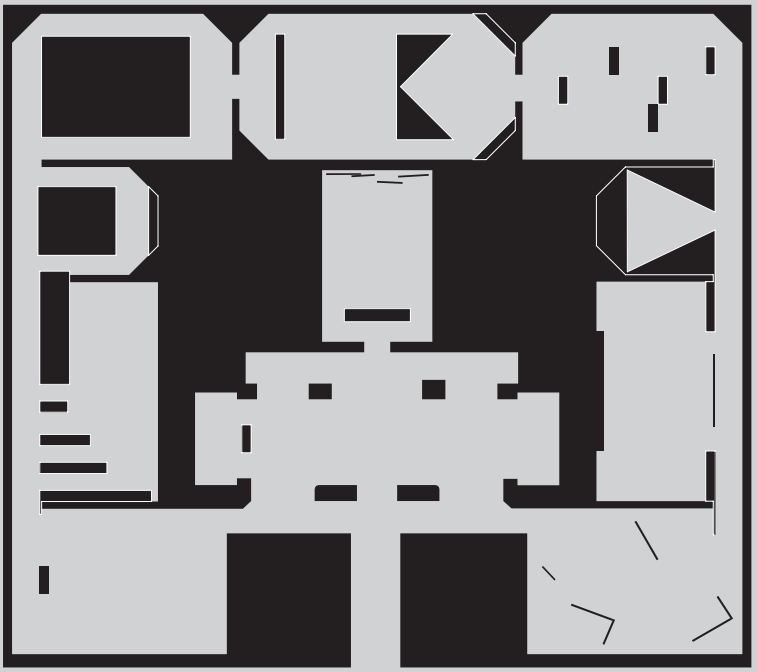
Van Abbemuseum
Bilderdijklaan 10
5611 NH Eindhoven
Netherlands
www.vanabbemuseum.nl

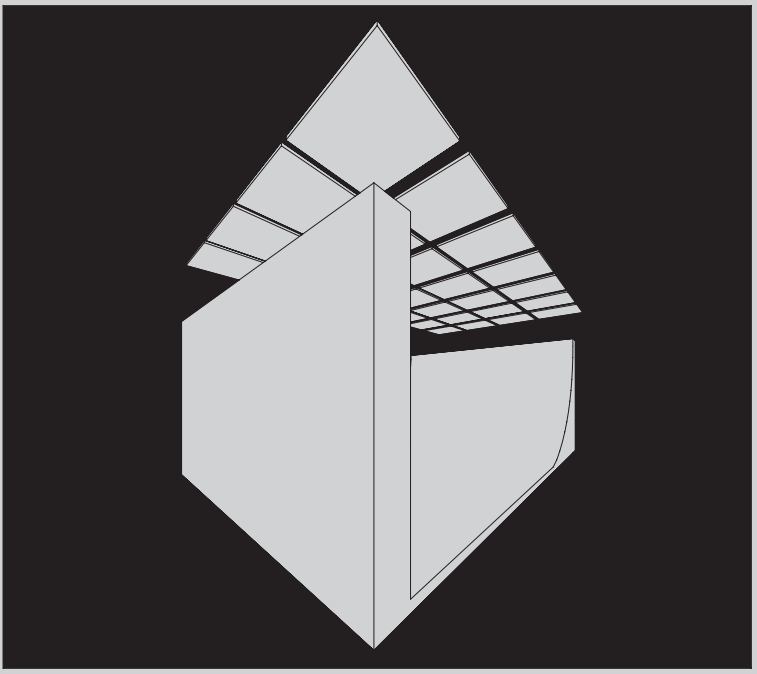
This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License.

creative commons

Hito Steyerl would like to thank all authors of the book as well as editor Nick Aikens, designer Bardhi Haliti, proofreaders and technical team for producing the book under tremendous time pressure and in such good spirits. Thanks as well to Annie Fletcher and Charles Esche of the Van Abbemuseum and Aileen Burns and Johan Lundh of IMA Brisbane for creating the opportunity for this publication with the two survey shows of my work. I would further like to thank my students as well as Esme Buden for patiently discussing my weird ideas. The title of this book in particular stems from a seminar organised by Janus Høm and Martyn Reynolds called: "Aggregating the endless scroll of post-Internet art".

I would like to thank Brian Kuan Wood, David Riff, Anton Vidokle, Sven Lütticken, Wilfried Lentz, Christoph Manz, Alwin Franke, Rabih Mroué and Leon Kahane for longstanding discussions and longtime collaborations. My work would not have been possible without their support over the last few years. Thanks also to Wilfried Lentz and Andrew Kreps for generously funding the publication. Special thanks to Mark Waschke and Filipa Cesar for keeping an eye on Esme.





The exhibition architecture for Hito Steyerl's retrospective at the Van Abbemuseum presents itself as a loop, a linear corridor, which holds, at its very center, *Adorno's Grey*. It opens up a narrative in which circulation space is mobilised as a means to unfold a series of chapters that are transcribed into individual spaces along this passageway.

The design of the show functions like an insert into the overall institutional space of the Van Abbe: rather than thinking about a series of exhibition spaces that follow a logic of gradual movement through each of the works, the design allows the individual pieces to be read as a body of work.

Partially hidden between and behind physical separations, the works create a new spatial framework through which the audience gradually disappears into the exhibition itself. A continuous three-metre floating datum acts as a visual ceiling that inhabits all interventions, projections, screens and – more generally speaking – spaces for observation and pause.

In anticipation of the *parcours* of the exhibition, the viewer enters the foyer and encounters *Surveillance: Disappearance*, already virtually immersing in and merging with the work.

This exhibition design will be adapted to the architecture of the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane.

Studio Miessen, 2014

Too Much World
The Films of Hito Steyerl

Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane



ISBN 978-3-956790-57-7